PLAYS OF
G. MARTINÉZ SIERRA

VOL. II

IN ENGLISH VERSIONS BY

HELEN AND HARLEY GRANVILLE-BARKER

PLAYS OF G. MARTINEZ SIERRA

VOLUME TWO

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PLAYS OF G. MARTÍNEZ SIERRA

Volume II

THE KINGDOM OF GOD
(*El Reino de Dios*)

THE TWO SHEPHERDS
(*Los Pastores*)

WIFE TO A FAMOUS MAN
(*La Mujer del Héroe*)

THE ROMANTIC YOUNG LADY
(*Sueño de una Noche de Agosto*)

IN ENGISH VERSIONS BY
HELEN AND HARLEY GRANVILLE-BARKER

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THE KINGDOM OF GOD

PLAY IN THREE ACTS

TEATRO DE NOVEPADES, BARCELONA

1915

CHARACTERS

First Act.	*Second Act.*	*Third Act.*
Sister Gracia.	Sister Gracia.	Sister Gracia.
Sister Juliana.	Margarita.	Sister Dionisia.
Sister Manuela.	Candelas.	Engracia.
María Isabel.	Quica.	The Innocent.
Lulu.	Cecilia.	Paquita.
Don Lorenzo.	The Dumb Girl.	Lorenza.
Trajano.	Sister Cristina.	Morenito.
Gabriel.	Sister Feliciana.	Felipe.
Liborio.	Enrique.	Juan de Dios.
Two Old Men.		Vicente.
		Policarpo.
		Several Children.

The first act takes place in an asylum for poor old men; the second in a maternity home; the third in an orphanage.

In the first act Sister Gracia *is 19, in the second 29, and in the third act she is 70.*

It should be noted that Sister Gracia *is not a nun. She belongs to the order of St. Vincent de Paul, which is dedicated to the care of the sick and the teaching of children. The Sisters take their vows year by year, and they may renew them or not as they wish.*

ACT I

The garden of a ducal palace that has been converted to a home for poverty-stricken old men. The garden itself is still both stately and charming. We are in a part of it that is walled with clipped hedges of box and myrtle; upon the left is a bower of cypress; in the half distance a screen of plane trees and chestnuts. In the middle is a fountain surrounded by beds of flowers. And in the arbour and behind the fountain are marble benches of classic design. Upon the right stands the ci-devant palace which is reached by marble steps across a terrace that is of marble too. Upon this terrace open the long windows of the rooms which were once the salons, but are now the dormitories and living-rooms of the present inmates. Below the terrace a little service door shows the way into the lower regions of the house.

It is autumn. The leaves of the plane trees and chestnuts have already turned red and gold. Over the terrace balustrade is twined a flaming creeper. In the flower beds are dahlias and chrysanthemums, and upon the rose trees a few last roses cling. Dead leaves drift upon the walks and steps where the autumn wind has blown them.

It is the afternoon of a clear bright October day in Castile. The sun soon begins to set; the sky is lit by flaming colours which fade after a little to a pallor that is brightened, then, by the evening star.

GABRIEL, *one of the old pensioners, is sitting on a bench cracking pine-nuts with a stone. He is a very thin old man, shrunk within his blue uniform. But he is as sharp*

as a needle and as lively as a lizard; and his eyes are always expressionlessly ablink. He eats the pine-kernels with all the pleasure of second childhood.

TRAJANO, *a still older inmate, is walking backwards and forwards evidently somewhat out of temper. He has a fine, rather apostolic, head; he limps a little from rheumatism.*

Another old man, passing at the back, salutes them both.

THE OLD MAN. Good afternoon, gentlemen.

GABRIEL. Same to you.

[*The old man passes on.*]

GABRIEL. And a beautiful afternoon it is. Good to sit and warm one's bones in such an October sun.

[*He gives a little shrill laugh.* TRAJANO, *for all that he was spoken to, makes no pause in his walking and gives no answer but a grunt.* GABRIEL *goes on cracking his nuts and, as* TRAJANO *passes him, holds one out, ready peeled.*]

GABRIEL. Have one?

[TRAJANO *looks him up and down with quite an Olympic disdain.*]

TRAJANO. What is that, pray?

GABRIEL. A pine nut.

TRAJANO. [*Contemptuously.*] A pine nut!

[*For all his contempt, however, he takes—not the one offered him, but a whole handful that are lying there cracked, and munches them as he talks.*]

TRAJANO. And how did you come by these, may I ask?

GABRIEL. Sister Josefita gave them to me.

TRAJANO. The cook! Oh indeed . . . filched them out of our tomorrow's dessert, did she?

GABRIEL. No, she did not. These are not Asylum pine-nuts. They are some that were specially given to the Sisters by the Warden . . . God bless him. [*He politely lifts his hat.*]

TRAJANO. [*With ill-concealed envy.*] I say, I say . . . is that a new hat you've got?

GABRIEL. [*With mischievous satisfaction.*] Yes indeed . . . it's a new hat. I had it dealt out to me this morning.

TRAJANO. Sister Martina gave it to you, did she?

GABRIEL. [*Delighted that* TRAJANO *is losing his temper.*] Yes, Señor . . . Sister Martina.

TRAJANO. That's flat favouritism! There are hats about much worse than your hat was.

[GABRIEL *smiles even more maliciously, and* TRAJANO *begins to walk up and down again, grumbling to himself.*]

TRAJANO. But as long as you can get round the Sisters . . . ! Pull . . . that's all it is . . . pull! [*Suddenly stopping in front of* GABRIEL.] Look here now . . . how do you work it . . . every Sister in the place ready to black your boots for you?

GABRIEL. [*Still highly delighted.*] The Sisters do treat me better than I deserve, no doubt . . . because, I should say, they are ladies who know how to value good breeding. And . . . though I say it that shouldn't . . . I have breeding!

TRAJANO. You're a snob . . . that's what you are.

GABRIEL. Well, I'd sooner be a snob than an anarchist!

TRAJANO. Are you referring to me?

GABRIEL. If the cap fits you can wear it.

[TRAJANO *again looks him up and down with supreme disdain, and then resumes his pacing, while* GABRIEL *goes back to cracking his nuts.*]

GABRIEL. Not walking out this afternoon?

TRAJANO. Are you addressing me?

GABRIEL. [*Urbanely.*] Yes . . . if I may so far presume.

TRAJANO. [*Relaxing a little.*] No, Señor . . . I am not going out.

GABRIEL. For a very good reason, I'm sure.

TRAJANO. I have no wish to go out.

[GABRIEL *laughs slyly.*]

TRAJANO. And what the devil are you grinning at?

GABRIEL. Oh . . . I'm staying in just for the same reason.

[TRAJANO *interrogates him with a haughty stare.*]

GABRIEL. For where can a man go to without a penny in his pocket?

TRAJANO. Thank you . . . I have all the money I need. And enough to take you with me . . . if I wanted to. Look here!

[*He takes out his pocket-book, and out of the pocket-book a folded piece of paper, and with great care he produces a silver coin.* GABRIEL *darts up and gazes at the money as if a miracle had just been performed.*]

GABRIEL. A peseta!

TRAJANO. [*Folding it away again as if he feared it might evaporate.*] Yes, Señor . . . and earned by honest toil . . . not by licking people's boots, mark you . . . like some I know.

GABRIEL. Licking people's . . . ! Do you mean that for me?

TRAJANO. Aha, my friend . . . if the cap fits you can wear it.

[*This time* GABRIEL *sits down in a sulk,* TRAJANO, *cheered by his little revenge, starts his pacing again and flourishes out his words like a very Cyrano.*]

TRAJANO. A peseta . . . Yes, Señor Gabriel, [*He pronounces the name with utter contempt.*] yes, indeed . . . a peseta. The Warden gave it me . . . God bless him [*and he takes off his hat in ironic imitation*] for mending a lock for him. I've no need to lower myself to praying to the Saints when I don't believe in them . . . so that the Sisters shall run after me and spoil me. Trajano Fernandez' conscience is not to be bought with a handful of pine-nuts. [*Then follows a solemn pause till he says.*] And if I do not walk out this afternoon . . . and it re-

mains to be seen whether I do walk out or not . . . I have not the remotest intention of first asking leave from any lady-bishop alive.

GABRIEL. Lady-Bishop! My good man . . . when you want to speak of Sister Manuela can't you call her by her proper name as every other well-mannered person does?

[GABRIEL *rises, very fussed. But* TRAJANO *only laughs.*]

GABRIEL. Don't laugh . . . don't laugh, please. It makes me very angry.

TRAJANO. I didn't confer the title on her! The chaplain calls her that . . . and the Warden . . . God bless him. And so do the parish priest and the doctor and all the other sisters. And quite right too . . . for a more dictatorial woman was never born.

GABRIEL. And so she should be. What else is she the Superior for?

TRAJANO. But as for yours truly he takes no orders from any Sister of Mercy. Don't the rules lay it down that we have a right to walk out on a Sunday afternoon? Do they or don't they? Well if they do . . . it'll take a ton of pine-nuts to make me go asking leave from a lot of petticoats . . . as if I was a schoolboy. Thank you . . . I left school some time ago.

GABRIEL. [*Between his teeth.*] Where they didn't teach you manners anyhow!

[*He begins to pick up the nutshells that* TRAJANO *has scattered and puts them with his own into a blue and white checked pocket-handkerchief.*]

TRAJANO. What's that you're doing?

GABRIEL. Picking up the nutshells you threw about. You know well enough that Sister Manuela doesn't like to see rubbish lying around.

TRAJANO. [*Grumbling.*] There again! Tidy up! I'm fed up with being told to tidy up. Don't throw nutshells about! Don't spit! Wipe your boots before entering a room . . . so that the lady-bishop can show off her

nice waxed floors to the visitors. Wash your face once a day . . . and your hands twice a day at least . . . and your feet every Saturday, rain or fine! And as if that weren't enough . . . take a bath every two months! Am I a man or a frog? Water . . . water . . . water! Give me wine. Yes, indeed . . . a glass of wine for dinner . . . that's what we need . . . as I keep on saying. What an idea to put a place like this in the charge of Sisters of Charity! Women do not understand men. Am I right or not?

GABRIEL. [*Sighing in spite of himself.*] Well . . . about the water . . . and about the wine . . . why, yes, I think you are.

[*At this moment a little burst of women's laughter is heard; and* SISTER GRACIA *and* SISTER JULIANA *come along the path at the back carrying between them —and hardly able to carry—an immense basket of potatoes. They are laughing because, as the basket is so full, some of the potatoes keep rolling out on to the ground.* SISTER GRACIA *is a girl of nineteen, pretty, fragile, and very gay.* SISTER JULIANA *is about the same age, but commonplace to look at, her face high-coloured. She talks rather affectedly and self-consciously, trying to appear refined.*]

SISTER GRACIA. There go some more good potatoes. Oo . . . this basket's heavier than a mortal sin.

[*She lets go the handle, but as* SISTER JULIANA *keeps hold of hers quantities of potatoes roll out as the basket tips.*]

SISTER GRACIA. [*Still laughing.*] Now we've done it!

SISTER JULIANA. Aie . . . ! Sister . . . Sister . . . don't laugh like that. Some one might hear you.

[GABRIEL *rushes forward to help pick up the potatoes.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Thank you, Gabriel.

GABRIEL. Don't mention it, Señorita.

SISTER GRACIA. Señorita! Why ever must you call me that?

GABRIEL. Oh, Señorita, I beg your pardon . . . Sister Gracia I meant to say. But I'm so used to think of you as . . . you see. And though you do wear the habit now, I can never forget that you're the Marquis's granddaughter . . . rest his soul.

SISTER GRACIA. I'm nobody's granddaughter here, Gabriel. I'm a Sister of Charity . . . and that's all you need to remember. [*Then to* TRAJANO *who stands by majestically indifferent.*] And you might help too . . . mightn't you?

SISTER JULIANA. He help us! He's an atheist. He'd like to see us all killed and eaten.

TRAJANO. I am not an atheist . . . I want no one killed and eaten. I am a Radical and a Freethinker.

GABRIEL. [*Maliciously.*] And a Freemason.

TRAJANO. [*Rounding on him.*] Yes . . . and a Freemason . . . and proud to be one.

SISTER JULIANA. [*Crossing herself in terror.*] Ave Maria . . . hold your tongue . . . hold your tongue.

[TRAJANO *turns very oratorical and solemn. He is glad to have shocked her, as he dislikes her extremely.*]

TRAJANO. And of the Scottish Rite . . . as is the German Emperor . . . and the King of England . . . and King Victor Emmanuel . . . who in 1870 made Rome the capital of Italy.

SISTER GRACIA. [*Rallying him affectionately.*] Quite so . . . most suitable company for you, I'm sure.

TRAJANO. [*Gallantly.*] And I was in your father's company too.

SISTER JULIANA. Holy Virgin!

TRAJANO. [*Rounding on her.*] Yes, Señora . . . in the company of Lorenzo Benevidez . . . an honoured

tribune of the people . . . and a spiritual heir of that great republic that said to the negro slave, "Arise, be free . . . you also are a man."

SISTER GRACIA. [*A little sadly.*] Quite so, quite so . . . that'll do.

TRAJANO. But what is there to sigh about in that? Your father and those like him . . . though indeed there aren't many like him . . . are the only hope of Spain. And thanks to them there shall one day be no more social injustice. But rich and poor will feast together . . .

SISTER JULIANA. And there'll be lots of wine on the table.

TRAJANO. [*Turning on her viperously.*] A little more than we get here . . . yes, let's hope so. [*Then to* SISTER GRACIA *again.*] No more privileged classes . . . no aristocrats . . . no convents.

[*He begins to get excited, and* SISTER GRACIA, *to quiet him, says pleasantly and gaily.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Well, I daresay not . . . but you needn't choke over it. And if you'll pick up some of these potatoes God will reward you for that.

TRAJANO. [*As he stoops with some difficulty.*] I pick up these potatoes for your father's daughter. But . . . [*The blood is rushing to his head.*] for all that, a day will come . . . a day will come . . .

SISTER GRACIA. When you and your King of England will cut off our heads . . . we're quite aware of that. Yes, you'll cut off our heads and then we shall go straight to heaven . . . and be very glad to get there. And once we're there we shall pray to God for you and get you to glory in spite of yourselves. And with that beard and bald head of yours they may even mistake you for St. Peter . . . who knows! [*Then as she takes the potatoes.*] Many thanks.

TRAJANO. [*Wheezing and coughing.*] The . . . Social . . . Revolution . . . will come . . .

[*He sinks on a bench, half choking with asthma.* SISTER GRACIA *goes to him and wipes the sweat from his forehead.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Come now . . . here's a Marquis's granddaughter wiping your forehead for you. How much further can your Social Revolution take you?

[SISTER JULIANA *and* GABRIEL *are putting the last potatoes in the basket. She looks up suddenly and then says.*]

SISTER JULIANA. Sister Manuela!

TRAJANO. [*Trying to struggle to his feet and like a scared schoolboy.*] The lady-bishop!

[SISTER GRACIA *rests her hand on his shoulder to quiet him as* SISTER MANUELA *comes majestically down the marble steps. She is a woman of fifty, energetic, a little harsh of speech but good at heart. She wears spectacles.*]

SISTER MANUELA. [*To the two girls.*] What are you doing here?

SISTER JULIANA. Picking up the potatoes . . . the basket upset.

SISTER MANUELA. Couldn't the gardener have carried it for you?

SISTER GRACIA. Well . . . it's Sunday you see . . . and he was in such a hurry to get down to the village. There's a dance on and his sweetheart was waiting for him. So we told him . . . begging your pardon . . . that we could manage it ourselves quite well.

SISTER MANUELA. Well . . . don't let it happen again. You know that I don't like the Sisters to carry such heavy loads. We all have our appointed tasks . . . and God keeps us from failing in those.

SISTER GRACIA. Yes, Reverend Mother.

SISTER MANUELA. [*To the two old men.*] You two can carry it to the kitchen. A little exercise won't do you any harm.

[TRAJANO *and* GABRIEL *lay hold of the basket, and* SISTER MANUELA *is passing on when* SISTER GRACIA *detains her by saying*:]

SISTER GRACIA. Reverend Mother.

SISTER MANUELA. What is it?

SISTER GRACIA. May I ask a favour? Will you give Trajano leave to go into town? This is the day for it.

SISTER MANUELA. Why doesn't he ask me himself?

SISTER GRACIA. [*Glancing at* TRAJANO *out of the corner of her eye.*] He doesn't like to.

SISTER MANUELA. [*Assuming a tone of great severity.*] Because . . . I suppose . . . the last time he went he came home drunk.

TRAJANO. [*Feebly protesting.*] Not drunk, Señora . . . no, not really drunk.

SISTER MANUELA. As drunk as an owl. Have you forgotten, pray, that you tried to proclaim a Spanish Republic in the middle of supper?

SISTER GRACIA. But he won't get drunk today. I'll answer for him. [*To* TRAJANO.] That's so, isn't it? If you may go out you won't touch one drop . . . now will you?

[TRAJANO *gestures his promise by kissing his crossed fingers, and with mock solemnity she copies him.*]

SISTER GRACIA. There . . . the daughter of the tribune of the people has gone bail for you.

SISTER MANUELA. Well . . . I haven't much confidence in him. However, he can go out if he likes. What I do not like, though, is his going alone.

GABRIEL. [*Quickly.*] If the Reverend Mother would graciously permit me I should be most happy to accompany him.

TRAJANO. [*Only half to himself.*] Parasite!

SISTER MANUELA. [*Looking at* GABRIEL.] And I haven't much faith in him either. However . . . be off, both of you. You must be back before dark . . . remember that. [*She looks* TRAJANO *up and down and he trembles*

under her eye.] And perhaps you'd oblige me by making yourself look a little respectable before you go. You're a disgrace to the institution. [TRAJANO *surveys himself, puzzled and confused.*] How long since you washed your beard? There are wild beasts in that jungle I expect. My fault! I should have made you shave like the rest.

TRAJANO. [*Much offended.*] Let me assure you, Señora, that this venerable beard has never harboured . . .

SISTER MANUELA. You put it in the basin next time and soap it well. And now . . . take that away [*The potato basket.*] at once.

[TRAJANO *and* GABRIEL *go out carrying the basket between them,* TRAJANO *saying between his teeth . . .*]

TRAJANO. Before they made her a lady-bishop she must have been Grand Inquisitor of Spain . . . !

SISTER GRACIA. Thank you, oh, thank you, Reverend Mother . . . and God reward you.

SISTER MANUELA. He'll come back as he always does . . . and you'll be to blame. Well, that'll teach you not to be so soft-hearted. [SISTER GRACIA *looks abashed at this.*] Cheer up . . . there are visitors coming for you.

SISTER GRACIA. For me?

SISTER MANUELA. Your family telephoned they'd be here this afternoon . . . and quite soon. You can receive them in the garden here, if you like.

SISTER GRACIA. Yes . . . thank you, Reverend Mother.

[SISTER MANUELA *now passes on and away.* SISTER GRACIA *sits on one of the benches, and after a moment sighs pensively.*]

SISTER GRACIA. . . . coming to see me!

SISTER JULIANA. [*Rather officiously.*] Well, aren't you glad?

SISTER GRACIA. Oh yes . . . of course . . . I shall be glad to see them . . . very glad. Though Mother will give me a bad ten minutes as usual. She can't make up her mind to my being here. [*Then with an almost childish vexation.*] Well, no more can anyone else for that

matter. No one will believe that I have a vocation. Good heavens . . . why ever shouldn't I have! I know I'm not a saint. But . . . [*Very simply.*] God makes his choice from among us as he thinks best, after all. Besides we needn't wait for God to call us, need we? If we call to him, he'll answer . . . even though in ourselves we're of no account. That is so, don't you think? [*She gets up from the bench and passes her hands across her face as if to brush away the shadow of melancholy.*] Well, well . . . we can all feel certain of ourselves if we want to . . . and if we don't, so much the worse for us.

SISTER JULIANA. [*Looking at her as if hypnotised.*] Of course. . . .

SISTER GRACIA. Why are you looking at me like that? [*She looks down as if something might be wrong with her dress.*]

SISTER JULIANA. What a wonderful complexion you have! [*She goes up to* SISTER GRACIA *and takes her hand.*] What do Society ladies use to get themselves a skin like that?

SISTER GRACIA. [*Drawing her hand away.*] Soap and water . . . just what we have here.

SISTER JULIANA. Nothing else?

SISTER GRACIA. [*A little amused at the other's passionate curiosity.*] Well . . . it was all I was ever given.

SISTER JULIANA. [*Still more eagerly.*] I say . . . was your grandfather a Marquis?

SISTER GRACIA. Yes, he was.

SISTER JULIANA. And your father's a most important person in Parliament?

SISTER GRACIA. Well, yes . . . he's one of the people who make most noise there.

SISTER JULIANA. I say . . . [*Whenever she uses this phrase she half chokes with eagerness.*] Did you ever see the King?

SISTER GRACIA. Yes . . . often.

SISTER JULIANA. Close to?

SISTER GRACIA. Quite close. About a fortnight before I came here on probation I was dancing with him.

SISTER JULIANA. [*Her eyes starting from her head.*] Dancing with him!!

SISTER GRACIA. [*Quite simply.*] Yes . . . at a fête some San Sabastian ladies gave for the shipwrecked seamen.

[SISTER JULIANA *is torn between her fear of discussing something she thinks sinful and her desire to know it at all hazards.*]

SISTER JULIANA. Was it . . . fun?

SISTER GRACIA. For the King?

SISTER JULIANA. For you.

SISTER GRACIA. For me! Oh . . . when I hear the hand organ that stops outside the gate every morning . . . if you only knew how hard it is to stop myself taking a turn round the room with the nearest chair!

SISTER JULIANA. [*Professionally scandalised.*] Mother of God . . . don't say that. [*But after a moment, more curious than ever.*] And at the . . . at that ball . . . did you wear a dress with a train to it?

SISTER GRACIA. No . . . they're not in fashion.

SISTER JULIANA. [*With such an effort; as if she were hauling a bucket out of a well.*] But . . . your dress was cut low, wasn't it?

SISTER GRACIA. Just a little . . . down to here . . . that's all.

SISTER JULIANA. [*Crossing herself.*] Blessed Jesus . . . weren't you ashamed? I say . . . did you put rouge on?

SISTER GRACIA. Why on earth should I?

SISTER JULIANA. [*Lowering her eyes hypocritically.*] They say all Society ladies do.

SISTER GRACIA. Well, if they think they look too pale I daresay they do.

SISTER JULIANA. I say . . . and have you ever been to a theatre?

SISTER GRACIA. Well, of course.

SISTER JULIANA. Yes, of course . . . when you were in the world you did as they all do. [*Then she asks, very fearfully, so monstrous does it seem.*] And you've read novels?

SISTER GRACIA. [*A little impatient at last.*] Well . . . haven't you?

SISTER JULIANA. [*Scandalised.*] I? Why, you know I was an orphan and brought up in a convent . . . so I never had a chance. [*Then, her conscience pricking her for the lie.*] That's to say . . . once, a long time ago, I did read one. Another girl brought it in, hidden in her dress and lent it us. [*Prudishly, but still with a little pleasure remaining.*] Blessed Jesus . . . I wish I could forget about it. "Claudine's Adventures in Paris" it was called.

[SISTER GRACIA *goes off into peals of laughter, much to the other's annoyance.*]

SISTER JULIANA. What are you laughing at? Have you never read that?

SISTER GRACIA. The girls I was brought up amongst didn't read books of that sort.

[*She laughs still, and* SISTER JULIANA *gets up most offended.*]

SISTER JULIANA. Sister . . . you upset me exceedingly by laughing like that.

[*And she goes towards the house with much dignity.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Oh, don't be angry . . . please. I didn't mean to offend you . . . Sister Juliana . . . listen!

[*But* SISTER JULIANA *has vanished.* SISTER GRACIA *is on the point of following her, when she meets* TRAJANO *and* GABRIEL *coming out arm in arm.*]

GABRIEL. [*Very gallant.*] Any commissions to execute in town for the most beautiful of Sisters?

SISTER GRACIA. Nothing, thank you. Have a good time and don't waste your money.

GABRIEL. [*With an insinuating laugh.*] No affair of mine! Señor Trajano is the capitalist today.

[*Trajano is in a very bad humour because of the company that has been forced on him.*]

TRAJANO. I shall spend my money if I want to . . . but I shall spend it on myself!

GABRIEL. [*Magnanimously.*] Man alive . . . who wants your money?

[*The bell at the front gate is heard ringing.*]

GABRIEL. Some one at the gate. Visitors.

[DON LORENZO'S *voice is heard saying, "Don't trouble yourself, Sister, please. We know the way."*]

SISTER GRACIA. [*With suppressed joy.*] Father!

[DON LORENZO, MARÍA ISABEL, *and* LULU *come along the path.* SISTER GRACIA *unrestrainedly throws her arms round her father's neck, and then kisses her mother and sister.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Father . . . Father, how good to see you! Dear Mother! Lulu!

TRAJANO. Lorenzo Benevidez . . . friend of the People. [*He goes up and takes off his hat in fine style.*] I salute the Tribune.

[TRAJANO, *having accomplished this, goes his way with great dignity.* LORENZO *is a little surprised, but most amiably returns the salute.*]

LORENZO. Good-afternoon.

SISTER GRACIA. [*To her mother.*] How warm you look. [*Then to* LULU.] So do you. Sit down . . . it's shady here.

MARÍA ISABEL. [*As she sits, fanning herself.*] Oh, my dear child . . . the heat . . . and the dust! And the road . . . seven times at least I thought the car had broken in two. It shows how much we must want to see you . . . when we take such a terrible journey.

SISTER GRACIA. But if you've a saint in the family you must expect to make these hard pilgrimages. But it's so good to see you.

MARÍA ISABEL. Oh . . . much you care whether we come or not.

SISTER GRACIA. Don't say that, Mother, please.

MARÍA ISABEL. Mother! Don't call me Mother. Call me Mamma as you did at home.

SISTER GRACIA. Yes, Mamma, I will.

[*She is sitting by her mother, gentle, affectionate.*]

MARÍA ISABEL. Oh . . . your hands! What makes your fingers like that?

SISTER GRACIA. Peeling potatoes.

MARÍA ISABEL. You have been peeling potatoes!

SISTER GRACIA. Why, of course. You see, when it's my week in the kitchen . . .

MARÍA ISABEL. No, please . . . I don't want to hear about it.

[TRAJANO *has departed, but* GABRIEL *lingers, surveying the group; and now he approaches* MARÍA ISABEL, *with great elegance of deportment.*]

GABRIEL. Will you allow me to wish you a good afternoon, Señorita María Isabel?

MARÍA ISABEL. [*Blankly.*] Good afternoon.

SISTER GRACIA. Don't you recognise him? It's Gabriel.

GABRIEL. Gabriel, Señorita . . . valet to the late Marquis . . . now in glory, and God rest his soul! Doesn't the Señorita remember me? I'm not so young as I was, of course, and . . . [*He looks himself up and down with a little laugh.*] the livery here isn't quite so fine as the Marquis's . . . now in glory. Not that I want to grumble . . . no indeed, one might be much worse off.

[*While* GABRIEL *stands talking to* MARÍA ISABEL. SISTER GRACIA *goes to her father who is pacing up and down, silently slips her hand in his, and walks with him, as if she were a little girl. He is moved by this, holds her hand very tight, looks down at her tenderly. But he is silent too.*]

MARÍA ISABEL. Yes, indeed you might. You have a palace to live in, and a garden that a millionaire might envy

you. What things are coming to, I don't know. An almshouse! Think of all the money that was spent on this place . . . the famous parties they gave here, when I was a girl . . . everybody used to talk about them.

GABRIEL. Yes . . . even from the pulpit. The Duke of Torre Blanca's palace . . . these high places of our Modern Babylon . . . that's what his Grace the Archbishop said.

MARÍA ISABEL. If these trees could speak!

GABRIEL. [*Chuckling.*] They'd have some pretty stories to tell! Look here, Señorita . . . this arbour used to be called the Bower of Venus. And it had a statue in it which his Grace the Duke had brought from Italy . . . a very female statue . . . the Señorita will understand me. And now, you see, the Sisters have put the blessed Saint Cayetano there instead . . . our mediator in heaven. [*He chuckles again.*] But the ghosts that come walking back here must give him some very queer nights of it. Oh, but all the best gentlemen of Madrid used to come here. . . .

MARÍA ISABEL. And the worst women!

GABRIEL. Well . . . God created the one lot to balance the other, I suppose. And a fine lot they were, I tell you . . . worth staring at. They made the house what it was . . . and what it is. [*He grows confidential and important.*] For when his Grace the Duke went and died . . . his Grace, now in glory . . . probably . . . oh, they say they're not very hard on you up there when it has only been petticoats . . . when his Grace the Duke died here . . . for it was here he came back to die after trapesing all over the world . . . he'd hardly drawn his last breath when his two latest lady friends . . . one was fair and one was dark, and a pretty picture they made, I can tell you . . . they started to fill all the baskets and trunks in the place with whatever they could lay their hands on . . . clothes, pictures, mirrors, books, china . . . why, they took the very quilt off the poor gentleman's bed, a satin quilt it was, as thick as that, and embroidered

in colours with history-pictures two hundred years old! They didn't let the grass grow under their feet . . . the baggages. Why, it was like the day of judgment. And I saw it. For I'd been sent to enquire after the sick man by the Marquis . . . now in glory . . . and he was just at his last gasp when I got here . . . and there was the undertaker driving up at one door and the wagon full of things . . . piled high with them . . . driving off from the other. If they left the walls standing it was only that they shouldn't dirty their pretty hands with the bricks and mortar.

SISTER GRACIA. [*From her father's side.*] Gabriel . . . you'll lose Trajano.

GABRIEL. Quite right, Señorita . . . and I won't trouble the Señorita María Isabel any longer . . . and I hope she'll forgive me having taken the liberty. . . .

MARÍA ISABEL. Not at all . . . I'm glad to see that you're so happy here.

SISTER GRACIA. [*Quietly to her father—more a gesture than a sentence.*] Give him something.

GABRIEL. A very good afternoon to you, Don Lorenzo.

LORENZO. God be with you.

[*He gives him a coin.* GABRIEL *protests as he takes it.*]

GABRIEL. No, no . . . I couldn't think of it . . . I really couldn't. There's nothing that we want here . . . thank you, thank you! [*He glances furtively at the coin, and is overwhelmed.*] Two pesetas . . . oh, a thousand thanks!

SISTER GRACIA. Run along now . . . run along.

[GABRIEL *disappears, contemplating the coin and murmuring ecstatically "Two pesetas!"* MARÍA ISABEL *remains seated on the bench, musing over what she has just heard.* LULU *gets up and goes to peep through the foliage into the arbour.* SISTER GRACIA *still holds her father's hand.*]

SISTER GRACIA. How silent you are, Father. Talk to me a little.

LORENZO. What about?

SISTER GRACIA. About yourself. What are you busy at now?

LORENZO. The usual things. I'm rather pressed with . . . lots of things to think about . . . and getting to feel rather old.

SISTER GRACIA. Old . . . you! Since when, pray?

LORENZO. Ever since a certain little witch gave up coming into my study and untidying my papers for me. [*His voice turns a little husky, but he keeps it firm.*] There's a vacant place there, young lady.

SISTER GRACIA. Ah . . . don't say that to me . . . don't say that.

LORENZO. [*Smiling again.*] There, there, never mind! When I'm quite decrepit I'll petition the authorities to admit me here . . . and then you will look after me, won't you?

[*She doesn't answer; just kisses his hand. There are tears in his eyes.*]

LORENZO. As long as you're content . . . that's all that matters.

SISTER GRACIA. I am, Father . . . indeed I am.

LORENZO. Truly?

[*She lifts her face like a child, so that he may see she is not lying, and he looks her in the eyes.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Yes, look at me . . . truly, truly. And more than content today . . . because you've come to see me.

[*Without answering he rests his hand affectionately on her shoulder.* MARÍA ISABEL *surveys her husband and her daughter with a mixture of envy and commiseration.* LULU, *who has gone into the arbour, now gives a sudden cry, and rushes out again. They all turn to her.*]

MARÍA ISABEL. What is it . . . what has happened?

LULU. There . . . in the arbour . . . a man . . . or an animal . . . I don't know. But with eyes all burning . . . and it growled.

SISTER GRACIA. Don't be frightened. [*She goes and looks into the arbour.*] Oh, poor thing . . . it's Liborio. [*She calls gently.*] Come here. What are you doing in the arbour? Come out now . . . come out.

[*She pulls out a decrepit, pitiful, huddled up, trembling old negro, and draws him to a bench, talking the while.*]

SISTER GRACIA. This is the unluckiest of them all, poor fellow. He's . . . not quite right [*She taps her forehead.*] . . . but he's harmless.

[MARÍA ISABEL *surveys the old thing with horror, and* LULU *with disgust,* LORENZO *with some interest.*]

SISTER GRACIA. [*Speaking as to a child.*] Look . . . you've frightened this lady. There now . . . take off your hat to her.

LIBORIO. Liborio . . . not take off his hat . . . nobody loves him here . . . this not his country.

SISTER GRACIA. Yes it is . . . oh yes, it is.

LIBORIO. [*Getting a little excited.*] No . . . oh no . . . not his country. His country lost . . . Cuba was lost. [*To* LORENZO] That true, Señor? . . . yes . . . Cuba lost. [*Very mournfully.*] Liborio born in Cuba . . . no Cuba . . . so can't go back . . . no doubt of that . . . is there, Señor? [*Then a strange tone comes into his voice.*] No . . . not lost . . . the sea swallowed Cuba. But where's the sea . . . there's no sea either . . . no sea here. Only roads . . . roads . . . and Liborio walks . . . walks . . . walks. Oh, where is the sea? No sea . . . no sea. But policemen . . . and they beat you . . . and it's so cold . . . it's always cold here [*He is almost crying.*] . . . Liborio's cold.

SISTER GRACIA. [*Putting her arm round his shoulders as if really to warm him.*] No, no, you're not cold . . .

that's all imagination. There . . . sit down now . . . and don't shake so [*Then, over her shoulder, to her father.*] Give me a cigar.

[LORENZO *takes out a cigar.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Look, Liborio . . . just look what this gentleman is giving us.

LIBORIO. [*His eye kindling a little.*] A cigar . . . a cigar!

SISTER GRACIA. [*As pleased as he.*] Yes, a cigar . . . and look at the band on it . . . that says it's from your country . . . from Cuba.

LIBORIO. What—what then . . . Cuba not lost?

SISTER GRACIA. Why no . . . how can it be lost? Now off with you and light it . . . and see how warm the smoke will make you.

LIBORIO. [*Like a child.*] Yes . . . yes.

SISTER GRACIA. And then go to the kitchen . . . and tell Sister Juliana that I said she was to give you a cup of hot coffee.

LIBORIO. Coffee!

SISTER GRACIA. Yes . . . black coffee . . . as black as you are. Come along . . . I'll take you as far as the door, so that you shan't lose yourself. [*To her family.*] I'll be back in a minute. Come along.

[*She takes the old negro out through the little doorway that leads to the kitchens.*]

MARÍA ISABEL. What a horrible man . . . he must have the palsy . . . it gives one the creeps to look at him.

LULU. And he smelt! How can she go near him!!

MARÍA ISABEL. The girl's stark mad. Lorenzo, we must get her away from here at all costs.

[SISTER GRACIA *comes back and goes straight to her father. She is still full of her care for the poor creature.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Look here, Father . . . you're going to send me some cheap cigars . . . some of those confiscated

smuggled ones they sell off . . . and you're to keep all the bands from your Havanas, so that I can put them on the others . . . and then the poor thing can imagine. . . .

MARÍA ISABEL. [*Suddenly breaking out.*] What your father will do if he has one ounce of common sense . . . for you haven't . . . is to take you home with him this very minute.

SISTER GRACIA. [*Startled and grieved.*] Mother!

MARÍA ISABEL. My dear child . . . this has been a very pretty whim . . . but it has lasted long enough. Three months in a hospital dressing people's sores and laying them out when they were dead. Six months a probationer . . . making yourself look such a fright with that thing on your head. And now here . . . among these disgusting old men . . . why, they may be lepers! No . . . no more of it . . . Home you come with us this very minute.

SISTER GRACIA. [*Her eyes cast down . . . but her voice firm.*] No . . . I can't do that, Mother.

MARÍA ISABEL. Why can't you, pray?

SISTER GRACIA. I have taken a vow.

MARÍA ISABEL. Oh yes . . . for a year.

SISTER GRACIA. In my heart . . . I took it for all my life.

MARÍA ISABEL. Don't talk nonsense.

SISTER GRACIA. It's not nonsense, Mother.

MARÍA ISABEL. It is ridiculous affectation. You're a spoiled child . . . you've always been given your own way. And now you want to play at being a nun . . . just as you used to play sweethearts.

SISTER GRACIA. Mother!

MARÍA ISABEL. But please remember, my dear, that you're not of age yet. Your father can have something to say to this.

SISTER GRACIA. Father gave his consent.

MARÍA ISABEL. He did not . . . and you know that perfectly well. He let you go and said nothing about it

. . . which is not the same thing at all. You took very good care to leave the house when he wasn't there. And why? Because you were afraid he'd stop you.

SISTER GRACIA. That wasn't the reason.

MARÍA ISABEL. Wasn't it? Then perhaps it was because you hadn't the courage to say goodbye to him. Well . . . answer me.

SISTER GRACIA. Yes, that was why.

MARÍA ISABEL. Oh, you never found it very hard to get round people. [*Then to her husband.*] Well, here's your spoilt baby . . . Papa's darling . . . always in his pocket . . . crying if her dear father left home without saying goodbye to her . . . couldn't go to sleep at night unless he came in to kiss her . . . was to grow up to be the comfort of his old age. Well, here you have it . . . the comfort and happiness she promised you. And because she calls her conduct by a fine sounding name . . .

SISTER GRACIA. But, Mother, I've done nothing wrong.

MARÍA ISABEL. [*With a final fling of sorrowful wrath.*] And this is what children are given us for!

LORENZO. [*Quietly intervening.*] María Isabel . . . children are not an idle gift.

MARÍA ISABEL. What do you mean?

LORENZO. I mean that they are not our own just to do as we like with.

MARÍA ISABEL. So like a man! Easy to see that you don't suffer to bring them into the world.

LORENZO. [*Gravely.*] We sweat blood though, sometimes, to keep them alive in it. But we owe them more than that. Did we so deliberately plan to bring them into the world? They are ours through our frailty.

MARÍA ISABEL. Frailty!

LORENZO. What else? And if they are the fruit of our happiness what right have we to deny them their own . . . unless they seek it in evil ways?

MARÍA ISABEL. And you believe she'll find happiness here?

LORENZO. She has made herself believe so. What then can I say?

SISTER GRACIA. But I haven't *made* myself believe it, Father . . . I haven't indeed.

MARÍA ISABEL. Petted and brought up in luxury as she has been!

LORENZO. You were brought up in just such luxury. You were rich and came of a great family and you were nineteen as she is now. Every sort of pleasure was yours for the asking, and life promised you very many of them. Then you met me . . . a good for nothing, a firebrand . . . so your family told you. And certainly I was a nobody. But you gave up everything to endure privations and persecutions and suffering by my side. Isabel, have you forgotten the courage with which you faced it all . . . just for the sake of the love that we so believed in? Our first child was born in an attic . . . that's twenty-five years ago. Have you forgotten? I've not forgotten my debt to you. [*He kisses her hand.*] Ah, my dear . . . don't give your own nature the lie when you see it again in your daugher.

MARÍA ISABEL. What I did, I did because I loved you. That was very different.

SISTER GRACIA. Mother . . . I do this for love.

MARÍA ISABEL. [*Recovering her ill-temper.*] Love . . . who for? God! D'you imagine you're Saint Teresa?

SISTER GRACIA. No, Mother . . . I don't imagine any such thing. I know that I'm nobody. But then you don't need to be anybody here . . . for we're all nobodies together. Here, you see, we gather in people that the world has no more use for . . . no one loves them or wants them . . . they've nowhere to go . . . the poor, the sick, the homeless. Well then, one needs to be a nobody to be of any use to them . . . it's so much better to be a nobody . . . for the less you count in the world yourself . . . the closer you come to them.

MARÍA ISABEL. You need not live among poor people in order to help them.

SISTER GRACIA. Oh yes, Mother . . . oh yes, you must.

MARÍA ISABEL. Not at all. You can be charitable . . . you can give alms.

SISTER GRACIA. [*Quite carried away now.*] Give alms! No . . . no . . . oh, no! Where's the good in giving away a little of what you have too much of . . . and keeping the rest . . . and not caring . . . spending money amusing oneself . . . while they have so much to endure . . . and you do nothing for them, nothing at all. Because giving alms is nothing . . . oh, I don't mean one shouldn't give alms. But no . . . [*To her father.*] oh, isn't this true . . . for you've said so a thousand times . . . that one must give one's life, one's whole life . . . to the last breath and the last drop of blood, if one wants to atone for the wickedness of the world. For misery is wickedness and want is a crime . . . because God gave his world to us all alike . . . and our daily bread. And if his children starve and are homeless . . . that's a crime, yes, a crime. And the man who keeps more than he needs robs the man who's in need. Turn away your eyes when your brother is dying . . . and you're an accomplice in his death. Oh, Father, Father . . . when I've heard you speak . . . if only I could have been a man, a man like you . . . to speak like that so that people must hear me . . . and plead the cause of the oppressed, stand up for them, make laws that will help them! But of course I'm only an ignorant girl. What can I do? I might stand and shout for ever, and no one would listen. I'm no use. I'm nobody. I've nothing to give but my happiness . . . so I want to give that, you see, to those that have none.

LORENZO. My dear . . . my dear . . .

SISTER GRACIA. Because no one seems to think of giving that. Food, oh yes . . . but happiness! Why, if it's only

to amuse them a little . . . to joke with them . . . and then to make believe, so that just for a little they *may* believe that there's still something left for them to hope for . . . that they still count for something in the world . . . that they're human beings still. That's what matters, isn't it, Father?

LORENZO. Yes, you're right. That's to say. . . . Ah yes, my dear . . . believing as you do you are right to be doing what you do.

MARÍA ISABEL. And you say that, do you . . . when you believe in nothing at all.

LORENZO. I may not . . . but then she does.

MARÍA ISABEL. [*To* SISTER GRACIA.] You show great consideration . . . for everybody but us.

SISTER GRACIA. But you don't need me.

MARÍA ISABEL. And to think that when you were so high . . . how I cried and cried when they said you might die of diphtheria . . . and I took a vow to wear a penitent's dress for a year . . . and I cut off all my hair that your father was so fond of . . . and now . . . this is what happens. [*She begins to cry.*] One never does know what one is really asking God to grant.

SISTER GRACIA. [*Putting her arms round her mother, but smiling in spite of herself.*] Oh, mamma, don't say that . . . just because I'm still alive.

[LULU, *when this discussion began, had moved away to a further bench and begun to read a letter she took from her bag. She puts it away now, and rejoins* the group.]

LULU. Well . . . is the storm over? [*To* SISTER GRACIA.] Oh, my dear . . . mothers are very hard things to understand, aren't they? She's angry with you because you want to be a nun . . . and just as angry with me because I want to get married. [*Then with juvenile superiority.*] The fact is, I suppose, that if older people couldn't amuse themselves by upsetting themselves about nothing, they'd be bored to death . . . poor things!

MARÍA ISABEL. What's that you say?

LULU. [*With her soubrettish air.*] Oh . . . each time of life has its own sort of trouble. Young people are desperate because old people won't let them have their own way, and the old people are furious because the young ones won't do what they think right. So nobody's content.

MARÍA ISABEL. What has come over these girls . . . [*To her husband.*] And you listen to this so calmly. . . .

LULU. Papa always listens calmly when one's in the right.

LORENZO. But even if you're in the right you could put it more prettily.

[SISTER MANUELA *comes back along the path.*]

SISTER GRACIA. The Superior, Mother.

SISTER MANUELA. Good afternoon.

[*She looks at everybody and can tell well enough what has been going on. One should note that Sisters of Charity in Spain do not shake hands with men, though they may embrace their fathers and mothers.*]

LORENZO. Good afternoon, Señora.

MARÍA ISABEL. Good afternoon.

[*She rises, still a little disturbed.* LULU *salutes* SISTER MANUELA *who acknowledges it. The sun has now set and it begins to grow dark.*]

SISTER GRACIA. My mother . . . my father . . . my sister.

SISTER MANUELA. So pleased. Well . . . at last you have made up your minds to come. Sister Gracia must be delighted . . . she has been longing to see you. So have we. She has been with us five weeks now . . . and though you're so near you've not been to visit her . . .

MARÍA ISABEL. [*A little aggressively.*] You can understand, I think, that it isn't very pleasant for a father and mother to come only to make up their minds to their daughter burying herself alive in such a depressing place as this.

SISTER GRACIA. Mamma!

SISTER MANUELA. [*With a touch of irony.*] Oh, it isn't so bad. We have our small share of the pleasures of life too. Blue sky . . . fresh air . . . sunshine . . . and if you listen you can hear the birds singing quite contentedly before going to bed.

LULU. It is a beautiful garden.

SISTER MANUELA. Do you think so? Would you like, perhaps, to follow your sister's example . . . and come to us too?

MARÍA ISABEL. No, no . . . for heaven's sake! One crack-brain in the family is enough. Our only hope is that this one will recover her senses and come home again.

SISTER MANUELA. Well . . . she always can, of course. Our order takes no perpetual vows. Our sainted founder thought well to account for the weakness of human will. If any one of us finds her chain too heavy she can break it whenever she likes.

LORENZO. [*Smiling.*] Yes . . . it's an ideal union, no doubt. A heavenly marriage . . . with divorce at the discretion of one of the parties.

SISTER MANUELA. [*Taking this quite well.*] Oh really, really! But if you knew how very seldom anyone wants to leave us. . . .

LORENZO. Why, of course . . . easy divorce makes marriage lasting.

SISTER MANUELA. Ah . . . don't talk like that, please. But do sit down.

MARÍA ISABEL. No, thank you . . . we must be going. And I'm sure you've lots to do . . . both of you.

SISTER MANUELA. As it's Sunday the dinner bell won't ring till half past five. And Sister Gracia's on duty . . . so she has to wait in the garden till all the old men that have been out for their walk are safely back again. You can quite well keep her company here if you like.

MARÍA ISABEL. No . . . no, thank you . . . we really must go.

SISTER MANUELA. Well, come this way. We'll go through the greenhouse and I'll ask them to pick you a bunch of flowers. Sister Gracia always tells us how fond her mother is of flowers. So am I. That's a worldly failing I brought here with me twenty years ago . . . unconquered still.

[THE MOTHER SUPERIOR *goes on with* LORENZO *and* MARÍA ISABEL. SISTER GRACIA *and* LULU *follow them. Just as they disappear* SISTER JULIANA *can be seen at the little kitchen door looking after them curiously. She has a kitchen apron over her habit, a knife and a loaf in her hands, for she is slicing the bread for supper.*]

SISTER JULIANA. Oh . . . how pretty they look. And what hats!

[*She sighs and goes back to the kitchen. The dusk is deepening now. After a moment three old men pass along on their way in. The first, leaning heavily on his stick, does not stop. The second pauses at each bench he comes to, and sits down, wiping it first very carefully with his handkerchief. The third stops at every other step, gesticulating, talking to himself as if he were addressing some one else. First he argues, hotly, wrathfully. Then he looks at his supposed adversary with pitying condescension and assents ironically to what the fellow has been saying, as if he were humouring a madman. Finally he takes off his hat and bows, as if to let him pass. And then when the phantom has turned his back, he laughs, shrugs, watches him disappear, and then goes on his own way with the greatest complacency. Then a Sister of Charity passes with some flowers in her hand. And then* LIBORIO *comes from the kitchens, with his cigar still in his hand, and singing in great content. . . .*]

LIBORIO. Far off I see the Cuban mountains. . . .

[*The bell calling the Sisters to their refectory begins to ring.*]

LIBORIO. Bell! Sisters now going to supper. Sunday! chicken! Chicken and ham! Let them have chicken and let them have ham. Good women . . . give me coffee . . . and tobacco. [*He kisses the cigar.*] Aha . . . brown darling . . . brown darling . . . I kiss you because you were born . . . so happy . . . over there.

[*He goes on his way. The horn of a motor car is heard; and then* SISTER GRACIA *comes back looking anxiously about.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Oh . . . it's nearly dark . . . and those two are not back. [*Calling.*] Trajano! Gabriel!

[TRAJANO'S *voice is now heard, for he is singing at the top of it. After a moment he appears. He is a little drunk and in high good fellowship with* GABRIEL, *who is very cheery and a little drunk too, and has his arm protectingly round* TRAJANO'S *shoulder.*]

TRAJANO. [*Trolling it out.*]

Democracy's bright sword shall shine,
Its dauntless trumpet blow;
The blood of noble and of priest . . .

SISTER GRACIA. What's that you're singing?

The throne shall be the first to fall,
The church the last to end . . .

GABRIEL. That's right! Hurrah for the Republic! Glory be to the Goddess of Liberty!

SISTER GRACIA. Oh, Trajano! Oh, Gabriel . . .

That wildest beast of all no more
The Nation's heart shall rend!

SISTER GRACIA. Well, this time you've surpassed yourself, Trajano! This is how you keep your word to a lady! Drunk again!

TRAJANO. [*With the utmost dignity.*] I . . . drunk! Well . . . let me see now, let me see. Are you drunk, Trajano? Speak the truth, now. Yes, Señor Trajano Fernandez is undoubtedly drunk. But he is a free citizen . . . so what has any one to say to that? And what has the lady-bishop to say to that? Bring her here . . . fetch her right out here . . . the lady-bishop, so that I can drink her health in the name of the most worshipful Republic.

GABRIEL. In the name of her royal highness the Republic . . .

[GABRIEL *laughs foolishly and then pretends to open a carriage door and to bow the lady out.*]

GABRIEL. Will your royal highness the Republic be pleased to step in? If your royal highness will be good enough to give me your card, I will immediately acquaint the Warden . . . whom God preserve.

TRAJANO. I drink to the lady-bishop! Can't you see that I'm drinking to the lady-bishop?

SISTER GRACIA. Oh . . . for God's sake, Trajano . . .

TRAJANO. [*Solemnly.*] For whose sake? Will you please to remember that my god is not the god of Sinai? No, indeed! [*Then to* GABRIEL.] Is there a brotherhood of man, or is there not?

GABRIEL. Brotherhood-a-man? Please to step in, Señor Brotherhood-a-man. If your excellency would be kind enough . . .

TRAJANO. Is there a brotherhood of man or is there not?

SISTER GRACIA. Yes, by all means . . . only do be quiet or I shall get so scolded.

TRAJANO. Oh no . . . I'll not have that. If they attempt to scold you I shall raise an insurrection . . . I say that I will raise an insurrection.

SISTER GRACIA. Yes, yes . . . but quietly.

TRAJANO. I will raise that insurrection because I wish to raise that insurrection . . .

SISTER GRACIA. What you'd better do now at once is

to go and put your head under the pump and see if cold water won't sober you. Then no one need find out the state you came back in.

[*She takes him firmly by the arm and tries to get him away.*]

TRAJANO. Water . . . cold water! Never! Death rather than submission to tyranny.

SISTER GRACIA. [*Trying not to laugh.*] Oh dear, oh dear!

[LIBORIO *comes back. He is crying.* GABRIEL *greets him ceremoniously.*]

GABRIEL. Will your grace the duke kindly step in? If your grace will be kind enough to hand me your card . . .

SISTER GRACIA. Now what's happened to you?

[TRAJANO *looks at* LIBORIO *curiously and slowly goes up to him.*]

LIBORIO. Liborio cold . . . Liborio's cold.

SISTER GRACIA. Cold . . . on a beautiful evening like this? Why . . . didn't you smoke the cigar I gave you?

LIBORIO. Liborio not smoke . . . they beat him . . . they steal cigar.

SISTER GRACIA. Stole the cigar . . . who did?

TRAJANO. The government stole it, Señora . . . this damned tax-gathering government stole it. [*To* LIBORIO.] Now, don't you put up with it . . . you rise in rebellion.

SISTER GRACIA. [*To* TRAJANO.] Now you be quiet. [*To* LIBORIO.] Who stole it?

LIBORIO. White man . . . Spanish man . . . down in orchard.

SISTER GRACIA. In the orchard! Was it the gardener? The brute! There, don't cry . . . I'll make it all right.

LIBORIO. So Liborio no smoke it . . . Liborio no smoke it.

SISTER GRACIA. But you shall. Tomorrow I'll give you a cigar as big as . . . that.

[*The three old men are round* SISTER GRACIA *looking at her attentively.* LIBORIO *is sitting on a bench and she holds his hand.*]

LIBORIO. No tobacco here . . . no tobacco here.

SISTER GRACIA. Never mind then . . . we'll go to your country to find some.

LIBORIO. No, no . . . not my country. Cuba lost . . . Cuba lost.

SISTER GRACIA. Yes, I know it was. But now it has been found again.

LIBORIO. Where?

[SISTER GRACIA *looks round at a loss. Then, with an inspiration, she points to the evening star that is just visible in the sky.*]

SISTER GRACIA. There . . . look . . . look at it.

LIBORIO. Where?

SISTER GRACIA. There . . . up there . . . the star. Don't you see how beautiful it is . . . all alone . . . as it used to be on your flag. Look how it shines. There . . . there's your country.

LIBORIO. The star . . . the star! That Cuba?

SISTER GRACIA. Yes . . . didn't I tell you it had been found again? So now shall we go there . . . you and I together?

TRAJANO. And I?

GABRIEL. And I?

SISTER GRACIA. Yes, all four of us. We'll sail away in a boat . . .

LIBORIO. No sea left now. . . .

SISTER GRACIA. But what do we want with the sea? We'll sail our boat through the air . . . tonight when the moon rises. So come along now.

TRAJANO. Yes indeed . . . 'tenshun . . . quick march!

Democracy's bright sword shall shine
Its dauntless trumpet . . .

[GABRIEL *sees* SISTER MANUELA *at one of the windows and whispers in terror.*]

GABRIEL. The lady-bishop!

TRAJANO. What?

[*He is as dumbfounded, and looks round wondering what to do or say. Then a happy thought strikes him and he breaks gently into a different song.*]

TRAJANO. Oh . . . bleeding heart of Mary,
Our succour and . . .

SISTER MANUELA. [*From the window.*] Who's that singing?

[*The old men now hold their breath in anguish.*]

SISTER GRACIA. It's Trajano. He's here with me, Reverend Mother.

SISTER MANUELA. Is any one missing?

SISTER GRACIA. No, Reverend Mother . . . they're all back now.

SISTER MANUELA. Bring them in then, or they'll take cold in this night air.

SISTER GRACIA. Yes, Reverend Mother.

[SISTER MANUELA *disappears, and the old men breathe again.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Come along now . . . come along.

[*She goes first with* LIBORIO. *The two others follow her.* TRAJANO *singing in a whisper and hushing* GABRIEL, *apparently under the impression that it is he.*]

TRAJANO. Democracy's bright sword shall shine . . .
Sh! . . .
Its dauntless trumpet . . .
Sh! Sh! . . .

GABRIEL. The most serene lady-bishop is served.

SISTER GRACIA. Come along now . . . quietly.

LIBORIO. The star . . . the star . . . Cuba not lost . . .

TRAJANO. The blood of nobles and of priests . . .
Sh! . . .

Unceasingly shall flow . . .
The throne shall be . . .
Sh! . . . Sh! . . .

[*They go out by the little kitchen door. It is now quite dark.*]

CURTAIN

ACT II

A large patio which serves as a place of recreation for the inmates of a maternity home (for women who have "come to grief"), which has been established in some old noble mansion in the north of Castile.

The patio has thus something of the cloister about it, with its covered corridor, high gallery and great doors that open to the rooms which are now the eating and sleeping rooms of the institution.

The centre of the patio was once a garden, no doubt; now it is nothing but a jungle of uncared-for shrubs, lilies, celandine, hawthorn, and a tree or two, a walnut, a chestnut tree. On one side there is a well with its bucket and wheel and a stone trough that serves for a washing place. It is springtime, and some of the shrubs are in flower. On their branches though, hang sets of babies' clothing, aprons and handkerchiefs.

CANDELAS, CECILIA *and the* DUMB GIRL *are in the patio.* CANDELAS *is a swarthy young woman, with a bit of the devil about her. She has fine black-green eyes, and looks serpentlike when she moves about. She is poorly dressed, in a calico skirt which has been much turned, a blouse, and a knitted handkerchief crossed over her breast and tied at the back. Her voice is harsh. She has put a flower in her hair. Her sleeves are turned up over her brown arms while she washes some handkerchiefs in the trough. And she sings . . .*

CANDELAS. Aie!

I asked a sick man the complaint
Of which he was to die;
"Of loving you . . . of loving you,"
The sick man made reply.

[CECILIA *wearily lets fall the stocking she is knitting.*]

CECILIA. Aie!

CANDELAS. And what's the matter with you?

CECILIA. Nothing. I know that song.

CANDELAS. Well . . . singing scares away your troubles.

CECILIA. That depends on what they are.

CANDELAS. [*Mockingly.*] Oh, Holy Mother . . . depends on what they are, does it? What *are* your troubles, I should like to know? You fell in love and you had a baby. Well . . . what else are women for? Then he deserted you and they took you in here out of charity . . . and your character's gone . . . but that had gone a bit earlier, hadn't it? What you've got to do, my girl, is to make the best of a bad job . . . there's no help for it now, anyway. Besides . . . things happen because they're meant to . . . and you make them no better by crying about them. The day that your mother bore you your steps in this world were all counted . . . from your first to your last one.

[*She goes on with her washing . . . vigorously.*]

CECILIA. [*Half to herself.*] Oh . . . if I'd known how it was all going to end. . . .

CANDELAS. Yes, my girl . . . it's all been settled beforehand, every bit of it . . . and you've only to wait for it to come to pass. And nothing happens to any one that hasn't happened sometime to some one else. I tell you this world's like a road with a lot of inns along it . . . and if you're not cheated in one of them, why, you will be in another . . . and whichever one of them it is someone's always been cheated there before you. But I know . . . once you're all dressed up and ready to start you think you know everything . . . and nobody can advise you!

[*She keeps at her washing more furiously than ever and begins her song again.* SISTER CRISTINA, *a Sister of Charity, aged about 45, comes into the patio. She*

is the head of the Home, and is a sympathetic, well-bred woman, with an unaffected motherly dignity about her. But she thinks of the women under her charge as lost souls, for all that she pities them, as a woman may who knows what life is.

The great door by which she enters the patio has written over it in black letters the word "Lactantia." She unlocks and locks it again with the large key which is hung with the rosary at her belt. She crosses the patio slowly, taking in everything at a glance, picking up a little child's cap that has fallen from one of the branches and replacing it. She comes up to the group of women. CANDELAS, *when she sees her, leaves her washing and dries her hands on her apron.* CECILIA *picks up her stocking again. The* DUMB GIRL *does not move.*]

CECILIA. [*As she rises.*] Here's the Superior.

[SISTER CRISTINA *goes to the dumb girl and putting a hand on her head, says kindly.*]

SISTER CRISTINA. Good morning, my child . . . getting some fresh air . . . you're feeling stronger today.

[*The* DUMB GIRL *presses the baby she has in her arms to her breast and makes a queer unintelligible but rather frightened sound.*]

SISTER CRISTINA. Why, I'm not going to take him away from you! Don't hold him so tight . . . you'll smother him. Yes, he's your very own . . . don't be afraid. But let me look at him. What a beautiful boy. [*Then she turns to* CECILIA.] And what about yours?

CECILIA. [*Hanging her head.*] He's asleep.

[CECILIA'S *baby is in a basket turned cradle close beside her. As she goes to take it out* SISTER CRISTINA *bends over and says.*]

SISTER CRISTINA. Why, he must be nearly suffocated with all those clothes on him. Here, give him to me. Why, you don't even know how to dress a child. Little angel! So . . . let the air get to his head . . . then he

may grow up with a few more brains than his mother has. Here . . . take him now.

[*She takes the heavy shawl from the child's head and after tidying him gives him back to* CECILIA, *who immediately puts him back in the basket again.*]

SISTER CRISTINA. What . . . back in his basket again! Don't you feel like walking him up and down a little . . . or making some clothes for him . . . or even washing his face? What have you been doing all the morning . . . lying here like a log!

CECILIA. I've been crying . . .

SISTER CRISTINA. Crying! It's too late for that now.

CANDELAS. That's just what I tell her.

SISTER CRISTINA. Ah . . . and I've something to say to you too.

CANDELAS. Yes, please Señora . . .

SISTER CRISTINA. Yes, please, Señora! . . . but it goes in at one ear and out at the other.

CANDELAS. Oh no, Señora. Have I done something wrong? Honour bright . . . I never meant to.

SISTER CRISTINA. Never meant to glue your face to the dormitory window-grating and begin shouting at the top of your voice to those men, whoever they were, passing along the road?

CANDELAS. Muleteers they were . . . and they came from my village.

SISTER CRISTINA. Indeed! You're very anxious to let your village know that you're in a place like this.

CANDELAS. Well, it's no disgrace.

SISTER CRISTINA. Oh, not the least in the world, of course.

CANDELAS. [*Passionately.*] Why, this isn't a prison, is it? The police didn't bring me here for stealing or murder or doing any harm to anyone. I came because I chose to . . . and because I was unlucky enough to go loving a man far better than he deserved. And as I wasn't born

a Duchess or an Infanta of Spain myself I couldn't get my baby born into gold swaddling clothes, could I?

SISTER CRISTINA. Very well . . . don't get excited about it.

[*She is going on her way. But* CANDELAS *stops her.*]

CANDELAS. Sister Cristina!

SISTER CRISTINA. What is it?

CANDELAS. When are you going to let me go?

SISTER CRISTINA. You know well enough . . . in another four months' time.

CANDELAS. [*Sullenly.*] I've been here two already.

SISTER CRISTINA. Quite so . . . you have been here two, and there are four to come. That makes the six you have to stay.

CANDELAS. [*Protesting.*] Have to!

SISTER CRISTINA. [*Quietly and gravely.*] Yes . . . have to, young lady. The institution receives you, cares for you, doctors you, gives you all that you need. And in return you have to stay here and nurse a child. You were told that when you came.

CANDELAS. But mine's dead.

SISTER CRISTINA. And therefore you nurse someone else's . . . a poor little foundling. You have no child, and he has no mother, and our Charity brings you together. But aren't you glad to be doing a good deed?

CANDELAS. [*Passionately.*] Devils . . . heartless she-devils . . . to leave a baby on your doorstep like a dog. Mother of God . . . if mine had lived wouldn't I have walked out of here with my head high . . . and him in my arms.

CECILIA. That'd have been a fine sight, I'm sure!

CANDELAS. [*In a fury.*] A fine sight, would it? Well, I'd come here over again, so I would, if I could have him alive. Oh, let me go, Sister Cristina, do! Let me get away from here . . . for the love of God, let me.

Look, I'll take the one I'm nursing now away with me, and treat it like my own . . . I will.

SISTER CRISTINA. And next week you'd leave it on the doorstep here and be off and up to your tricks again as gay and as careless as you please. No, my girl, no . . . I'm an old hand now and know you, all of you . . . much better than I could wish. Here you stay your four short months . . . for they'll be the only ones you'll live as God meant you to. . . . [*She turns.*] What's this?

[SISTER FELICIANA, *a much older woman, comes through one of the doors, unlocking and locking it again with her key. She brings with her* QUICA, *a woman from some Castilian village, ugly, dirty and unkempt. She is holding a black shawl up to her mouth, and has a cotton handkerchief roughly tied round her head.*]

SISTER FELICIANA. Here we have quite an unexpected guest to entertain! [*Then to* QUICA, *who is hanging back in pretended shame.*] Come here, woman, and don't go on like that. You ought to be used to it by this time.

QUICA. Good afternoon, Sister Cristina.

SISTER CRISTINA. [*Recognising her.*] You . . . Quica . . . you!

SISTER FELICIANA. [*Sarcastically.*] Yes, Señora . . . and in all her glory! And it's so long since we last had the pleasure of her company, isn't it?

SISTER CRISTINA. [*Very angry.*] But . . . here again . . . for the fourth time! And not a year since you left us!

QUICA. [*Her head down but smiling ingratiatingly.*] Well . . . I can't see that we're to blame . . . for the poor little brats being so anxious to come into the world. We don't want 'em . . . you may take it from me.

SISTER CRISTINA. Hold your tongue! Have you no shame?

QUICA. Well . . . anyone can make a mistake, I suppose.

SISTER CRISTINA. One mistake . . . yes. But three! And at your age too! You ought to know better.

SISTER FELICIANA. [*With brutal sarcasm.*] And with that face . . . and got up as you are . . . a sight for sore eyes, I must say!

QUICA. Well, you'd have to be precious ugly not to find someone that'd look at you.

[SISTER FELICIANA *departs.*]

SISTER CRISTINA. Has the doctor seen you yet?

QUICA. Yes, Sister. Sister Feliciana has got the form filled out.

SISTER CRISTINA. Well, then . . . go and wash your face and tidy your hair. You don't earn enough by your wicked life, I see, to buy a brush and comb.

[QUICA *approaches* SISTER CRISTINA, *wheedlingly, stoops and tries to kiss the crucifix that hangs from her rosary.*]

QUICA. Sister Cristina . . .

SISTER CRISTINA. You know the way. No . . . I don't want to have anything to do with you.

QUICA. Oh, don't be angry with me, Sister Cristina. It's me that's got to suffer after all.

SISTER CRISTINA. Yes, my girl, that's true . . . and it seems as if you were all so anxious to get to hell that you didn't mind what you went through to make your way there. [*Then to* CANDELAS *as she walks away.*] And don't you stay here washing till the day of judgment. No one has asked you to. And if you catch cold we shall only have to take care of you.

CANDELAS. I want to earn the bread that I eat here . . . that's why I do it.

SISTER CRISTINA. [*Smiling.*] You're very scrupulous all of a sudden.

CANDELAS. Well, we've all got our pride!

SISTER CRISTINA. There . . . don't be touchy. Our duty here is to befriend you whether you deserve it or not. [*Then to* CECILIA.] Look after that child now, addle-

pate. Goodness, woman . . . no one would think it was your own!

[*She crosses the patio and goes out, locking the door behind her.*]

CANDELAS. Look there now . . . bolts and bars so that you shan't run away. Mother of God . . . if I could fly . . . I'd be a carrion crow!

CECILIA. She never sees you without scolding at you.

QUICA. [*Who has dropped her false shame and now seems rather pleased with herself.*] Yes, and she can scold . . . because she knows what she's scolding about. Before she put that dress on she was a woman the same as any of us . . . and she knows the world . . . not like the others . . . shocked at every mortal thing. [*Confidentially to* CANDELAS.] She was a widow, she was . . . and they say that she loved her man more than the apple of her eye . . . so did he her . . . and when he died she turned herself into a nun just so that she shouldn't love anyone else ever again . . . and she wasn't more than twenty-five!

CANDELAS. [*Passionately.*] Well, she was right . . . for when you've lost your own man, the world's a deal too full of the rest of them.

QUICA. Oh, it all depends. Is this your first time here?

CANDELAS. First and last . . . I take my oath.

QUICA. [*Cheerfully.*] But it's not so bad. To start with it doesn't cost you a cent . . . and you've a good doctor . . . and then there are the Sisters . . . and though they do think you the lowest of the low they look after you for dear charity's sake as if you were a queen. Why as soon as you're put to bed they kill a chicken for you . . . they do indeed. You get soup and your glass of sherry and chocolate and sponge cakes . . . and you've nothing to do for months but nurse a baby. And if you care to stay another six and nurse another they'll pay you four dollars a month for it. What more could you ask for? I've nursed seven already . . . counting my own and other people's.

I've lived four years and six months for nothing . . . and I've had about a thousand pesetas out of them.

CANDELAS. Well . . . I wouldn't come back for a million pesetas. I'd sooner die in the gutter like a dog . . . starve and freeze there . . . and be free. Why . . . here am I chained up for six months . . . and he with all the world to himself to do as he likes in . . . and forget me . . . if he gets a chance.

QUICA. Needn't ask who he is, I suppose?

CANDELAS. No, Señora . . . he was the father of my son.

QUICA. Well, I shouldn't worry. If you do find he's forgotten you . . . you can find someone else to remember you quick enough. There are men in the world and to spare.

CANDELAS. There's only one for me.

QUICA. Perhaps you're right . . . and they're all alike anyway! [*Then to* CECILIA.] That's so, isn't it?

CECILIA. I've never known but one . . . and he was a cur. That's his baby. [*She points to the basket.*] . . . because it *is* his . . . though his devil of a mother does say it isn't. There it is in a basket and wrapped up in a few old rags like a kitten . . . and he riding in his carriage. Five dollars he gave me when the old lady threw me out of the house. Five dollars! And him with stacks of money. [*She started speaking quietly enough, but now her voice has risen with excitement.*] Just think what I was when I went into service there . . . and then where I was when I left it! And then on the top of it all she had the face to say to me . . . the old swine . . . that I'd gone and seduced her son . . . because he wasn't of age! I know now what the old devil was up to. Wasn't of age! What about me? I wasn't eighteen. And I know what I ought to have done instead of coming here like a fool . . . made a scandal and put the two of them in gaol . . . yes, him and his mother both. For she knew well enough what was going on . . . and as long as there wasn't a baby coming

she was quite pleased for the boy to be getting his fun at home . . . for then he didn't want to get married . . . for when he gets married he gets half all their money, and that doesn't suit her at all. Curse him . . . and his mother . . . and his child . . . and me too for a fool to trust what he said to me . . . when he wanted to get his way. Said he was the master so he was . . . and all that he had he'd give me. It didn't cost him much, when his mother threw me out of the house to get out of that little promise. Think of it . . . think. Five dollars! Five dollars for life . . . and me with a baby on my back. And if I leave it behind me here I'm a bad mother. And if I take it I'm marked down a bad lot wherever I turn.

QUICA. Why don't you send it to its grandmamma by parcel post?

CANDELAS. [*Muttering gloomily to herself.*] Oh . . . if mine had lived . . .

CECILIA. [*Bitterly.*] Five dollars!

QUICA. Yes . . . if it was money you were after you did make a good bargain, didn't you!

CECILIA. And some women get motor-cars. . . .

QUICA. [*With confident philosophy.*] Ah . . . you're too young for that yet. Nobody gets anything out of it the first time . . . except [*She points to the baby in the basket.*] just what you've got out of it. Well, I'd better be off to my ward or Sister Cristina will be after me.

[*As she turns to go she literally tumbles over the* DUMB GIRL, *who, with her queer cry of alarm, clasps her baby tight to protect it.* QUICA *herself is startled for the moment.*]

QUICA. Saints in Heaven! Sorry . . . I didn't see you. But whatever do you mean by sitting listening there . . . as if you hadn't a mouth to open?

[*The* DUMB GIRL *glowers at her suspiciously.*]

CANDELAS. She *is* dumb.

QUICA. [*With cheerful cynicism.*] Dumb is she! And they say that it's getting into talk with men is the

ruin of you. Didn't make much odds to her! But there . . . when it's God's will you've only got to nod your head. [*She turns again to the dumb girl reinforcing what she says with much gesture.*] What . . . was he a handsome fellow, eh? . . . baby's father?

CANDELAS. Don't waste your time . . . she doesn't know a thing you're saying. You can make signs and write things to her in Spanish and French and everything else . . . there's nothing they haven't tried. One of the Sisters that's been in a deaf and dumb school asked her and asked her who she was and where she came from and such like . . . and she didn't even wink. The Warden says she's an idiot. But the doctor says she isn't . . . and that it's a mystery . . . and she must come from some country . . . I forget where . . . but it's a long way away and the sun shines there in the middle of the night.

QUICA. [*A little uneasily.*] But however did she get here?

CANDELAS. Nobody knows. One fine morning about two months back they opened the street door and found her lying flat on the ground in a faint . . . half starved she was and nearly dead with the cold. So they brought her in and the baby was born before she ever came to . . . and there she was at death's door for three weeks and longer. And now here she is . . . always staring at the baby as if she couldn't make out wherever it came from. And if you go near her she starts to howl like a perfect wolf for fear you're going to steal it from her.

[QUICA, *looking curiously at the child, almost by instinct takes a couple of steps towards* THE DUMB GIRL *who gives her queer cry of alarm.*]

CANDELAS. There . . . I told you so!

QUICA. All right . . . don't get scared, my girl. Nobody wants to steal another mouth to feed.

[*But* THE DUMB GIRL *still looks at them all with intense suspicion.*]

CANDELAS. [*Enviously.*] And the little brat's so pretty,

what's more . . . got a skin like milk and hair on its head that's the colour of corn . . . just like its mother's. Mine had fair hair too . . . though where he got it from I don't know . . . for I'm pretty dark . . . well, you should see his father!

[*Suddenly she draws her arm roughly across her eyes and then goes back to the trough, plunging her hands in the water. And, sharply and defiantly, as if she meant to stop herself crying, she begins to sing again.*]

CANDELAS. Aie . . .

Girl of the Mountains,
You made too free
When to ruin yourself
You ruined me.

[SISTER GRACIA *comes into the patio followed by two women carrying a large basket of rough-dried clothes. She points to the linen on the bushes.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Gather up all that too, and take it to be ironed. It must be ready by this afternoon.

[*The women collect the linen in silence and go out again carrying their basket with them.* SISTER GRACIA *is now 29. She is pale and evidently tired and overstrained, though she does her best to hide this by her smiles. When the women have gone she turns towards* THE DUMB GIRL *and her companions, but on the way to them she stops, gives a little sigh, and murmurs "Oh, Blessed Jesus." Then she leans against one of the pillars and closes her eyes. She is half fainting.* CANDELAS *sees and goes up to her anxiously.*]

CANDELAS. D'you feel ill? Oh . . . what's the matter?

SISTER GRACIA. [*Pulling herself together.*] Nothing, thank you . . . nothing at all. Don't be frightened.

CANDELAS. [*To* CECILIA.] Here . . . you! Go and fetch her a chair, can't you. D'you want some water?

[CECILIA *goes out and doesn't return.* QUICA *takes* THE DUMB GIRL'S *chair—she has risen too—and brings it to* SISTER GRACIA.]

CANDELAS. Sit down now.

SISTER GRACIA. [*Only anxious to get away from them.*] No, there's nothing the matter indeed. Please take no notice.

CANDELAS. Now, do sit down . . . won't you?

SISTER GRACIA. Oh . . . very well then.

[*She sits down and as soon as* CANDELAS *sees her safely in the chair, she dashes out to the right.*]

QUICA. But whatever is the matter, Sister Gracia?

SISTER GRACIA. [*Recognising her amazedly.*] You here again?

QUICA. [*Complacently.*] Yes, Señora.

SISTER GRACIA. And didn't you promise when you went away that you'd never so much as look at a man again?

QUICA. Well, there it is . . . you can't be sensible all the time!

SISTER GRACIA. [*With a sigh.*] God's will be done!

[THE DUMB GIRL *now comes slowly to* SISTER GRACIA *and kneeling puts her baby in her lap, leaves it there and remains looking at her and smiling.*]

QUICA. There . . . see what a present the dumb woman's brought you.

SISTER GRACIA. [*Smiling.*] Thank you . . . thank you . . .

QUICA. [*To* THE DUMB GIRL.] So you're not afraid of her!

[*The dumb girl looks from one to the other and smiles again at* SISTER GRACIA. CANDELAS *comes back, followed by* ENRIQUE. *She is carrying a glass of water.*]

CANDELAS. Look at her now . . . with the child on her lap! Isn't she beautiful? She's like the Blessed Virgin of Carmen. [*Then she goes down to* SISTER GRACIA, *very pleased with herself.*] Here's the doctor.

[*The doctor,* ENRIQUE, *is a man of about 35, pleasant, quite good looking. He is dressed in a plain dark suit.* SISTER GRACIA *jumps up on seeing him.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Oh, good heavens! [*Then to* CANDELAS.] But . . . what nonsense! Whoever told you to . . . ?

CANDELAS. Take what the saints provide, I say. What's the good of the doctor being here if we're not to call him when you're ill?

SISTER GRACIA. [*Giving* THE DUMB GIRL *back her child.*] Here.

ENRIQUE. [*Anxiously.*] But . . . were you really taken ill?

SISTER GRACIA. No, Señor, of course not . . . it was nothing but this girl's foolishness.

CANDELAS. [*A little slyly.*] And I tell you she was, Don Enrique. She leaned against that pillar . . . so. And she shut her eyes . . . so. And she went as white as a sheet, and if I hadn't got to her she'd have fallen flat on the ground.

ENRIQUE. Well . . . now let's see. What was the matter?

SISTER GRACIA. Nothing, nothing . . . take no notice. I spent the whole morning in the laundry where it's half dark . . . so when I came out into the patio the light dazzled me and made me dizzy . . . that was all. But this silly girl [CANDELAS.] is always making a fuss.

CANDELAS. I'm sure I meant well.

ENRIQUE. You really don't need me at all?

SISTER GRACIA. No really. Of course, if I do . . . ! I'm so sorry you've been disturbed.

ENRIQUE. That's nothing. If you do want me, I'm in the convalescent ward. Goodbye.

[*He goes out without looking back. But he caresses* THE DUMB GIRL'S *baby in passing and she looks at him smilingly too.*]

QUICA. He's a handsome man.

CANDELAS. And what a way with him . . . hasn't he, Sister Gracia?

SISTER GRACIA. You know all about such things, I'm sure.

CANDELAS. You're not cross with me, are you?

SISTER GRACIA. Yes, I am. Fancy going and worrying the doctor over a thing like that.

CANDELAS. Well, what else is he for? Besides, as it was you, he was only too glad to come [*To* QUICA.] wasn't he?

QUICA. Trust him. He's got eyes in his head.

CANDELAS. That he has . . . for I've seen him once a day going on for two months now . . . and I know he's got eyes in his head. He'll pass near a particular person and be knocked all of a heap, poor thing! Oh, everyone's noticed that. [*Then she looks at* SISTER GRACIA *and says coaxingly.*] You've an angel's face . . . that's a fact.

SISTER GRACIA. What *are* you both talking about?

[QUICA *bursts into laughter.*]

SISTER GRACIA. And what are you laughing at, pray?

QUICA. Oh . . . nothing at all, Señora. Don't be angry . . . I meant no harm.

CANDELAS. But what I say is that coifs can't hide faces . . . and in woman's face is man's perdition.

QUICA. Yes . . . and a woman's in a man's. . . .

CANDELAS. And if she looks all pale and sad and seems just to be crying out for someone to take care of her. . . .

[*The two are talking to each other, but with glances at* SISTER GRACIA, *who says very severely.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Will you please be quiet?

CANDELAS. We didn't mean you . . . for you're a saint . . . everyone knows that . . . but it's the very reason why I hate to see you here.

SISTER GRACIA. Do you indeed!

CANDELAS. I tell you, Sister . . . you don't know what you're missing.

QUICA. You don't . . . she's right . . . you don't.

SISTER GRACIA. [*Turning away.*] You're talking nonsense.

CANDELAS. Would I be a woman . . . and young and pretty . . . and be shut up here washing other women's babies' faces . . . when I might be having my own? Yes, Señora . . . it's her own babies . . . and their father's, the man she could love and who'd be mad about her . . . that's what a woman wants . . . so I tell you.

SISTER GRACIA. You've nothing more to do here, have you, either of you? So be off now, to the refectory, it's nearly dinner time.

CANDELAS. [*To herself, to* QUICA, *to the things she collects to carry off with her.*] Holy Mother . . . you don't know whether she's more beautiful to look at when she's angry or when she's pleased. Eyes like that . . . in a place like this . . . where no one has a chance look at them. . . . [*Then she sings again.*]

Oh, quickly drop your lids
To keep me in your eyes,
For there I've seen myself
At last . . . in Paradise.

SISTER GRACIA. [*Irritably.*] Be quiet . . . be quiet. You have a voice like a watchman's rattle.

CANDELAS. Have I? It was my voice though that first brought him running after me . . . for all that he has gone and left me now! Oh, Holy Mother! . . .

I have a grief, a grief
Which if I longer bear . . .

SISTER GRACIA. Really, you seem to have taken leave of your senses today. And haven't I told you to be off to the refectory? It's time our private patient took her walk.

QUICA. Oho . . . have we got a private patient here?

CANDELAS. Very private . . . for though she's done just what we all have, she can't possibly come and breathe the same air that we do . . . oh dear no!

QUICA. Well . . . people of position must do something to keep it up. We've no shame at any time, have we! Nor have they before things go wrong . . . but they have after . . . and that's always something. [*She laughs impudently at her own wit.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Are you both going . . . or are you not?

QUICA. Yes, Señora . . . this very minute. . . .

[*As she is turning to go she comes against the basket cradle.*]

QUICA. Well . . . just look what that girl's done . . . left her baby here!

SISTER GRACIA. Take it with you then.

CANDELAS. Yes, Señora . . . Aie . . . don't look at me as if I'd committed a crime!

SISTER GRACIA. Oh, be off . . . be off!

CANDELAS. Holy Mother. . . .

I have a grief, a grief
Which if I longer bear . . .
A coffin and a grave
For me they can prepare.

[*The song dies away. Left alone,* SISTER GRACIA *leans a moment against the stone trough to rest. Her face is drawn and sad, but after a little she smiles to herself and then goes to a door that has not been opened yet, opens it and disappears and then comes back with* MARGARITA, *saying.*]

SISTER GRACIA. You can come out now.

MARGARITA. There's no one here?

SISTER GRACIA. No one at all. They've all gone to dinner.

[MARGARITA *is a delicately pretty girl of 20. Her*

plain dark dress and the large silk scarf of blue and black that she wears stamp her as belonging to the middle classes. The settled look on her face speaks of a medley of shame and anger, and her voice is sometimes sad and sometimes sharp with a sort of despair. She comes in not lifting her eyes, sinks into the first chair she finds and murmurs half articulately.]

MARGARITA. Mother of God. . . .

[SISTER GRACIA *goes to her and speaks very gently, very kindly.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Now, my child . . . you mustn't torment yourself any more. Look what a wonderful day it is. Aren't you glad of this sunshine after all the cold and rain?

[MARGARITA, *her eyes on the ground, makes no reply.* SISTER GRACIA *goes to one of the blossoming trees and breaks off a little branch which she throws lightly into the girl's lap. Still no movement, no reply. Then* SISTER GRACIA *puts a hand to her forehead and lifts the sunk head.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Lift that head now. What do you want with your eyes always fixed on the ground? Look up at the sky. God is there, and he'll comfort you.

MARGARITA. [*Stubbornly.*] God won't look at me.

SISTER GRACIA. [*Still kind, but a little more sternly.*] Won't he? Is your sin too great . . . or do you think his mercy is too small?

MARGARITA. God is merciful to you, isn't he, when your heart is softened. Mine has only been broken.

SISTER GRACIA. No, don't say that . . . you mustn't say that.

[MARGARITA *hides her face in her hands and begins to cry.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Now don't cry . . . you know how it upsets you . . . it's very dangerous. . . .

MARGARITA. Oh . . . I'm not going to die . . . no fear of that. You never do die when you want to.

SISTER GRACIA. [*Smiling.*] Hush now . . . or Death may hear . . . and come for you.

MARGARITA. I wish it would . . . Oh, I wish it would. If I could just die and forget . . . yes, die here . . . in this infamous place . . . and then no one would ever hear of me again! If I could be buried here and forgotten . . . with my shame and my wrongs. . . .

SISTER GRACIA. [*A firm hand on her shoulder.*] And with your child too?

MARGARITA. [*Fixedly.*] Yes . . . my child too.

SISTER GRACIA. [*Horror-struck.*] Blessed Jesus! [*But she rallies her kind smile again.*] How sorry you'll be that you said that, once he's born and you hold him in your arms.

MARGARITA. My punishment.

SISTER GRACIA. No, no, no . . . a son can never be his mother's punishment.

MARGARITA. Not when he is her dishonour?

SISTER GRACIA. The child's no dishonour . . . only the sin is that.

MARGARITA. It's the same thing.

SISTER GRACIA. It is not. When God sends you a child he offers you pardon for your sin.

MARGARITA. Pardon. . . .

SISTER GRACIA. Why yes. Would you have left sinning if the child had not come to convince you that you were sinning? God puts redemption in your arms. Don't miss the chance of it. Oh, think what it can mean to you to live and suffer for your child . . . and to teach him to be good. God in his mercy is calling to you . . . and you must answer . . . you must not turn away. Oh yes . . . cry if you want to because you repent . . . but not because you're in despair. And in a little while now an angel will come to dry your tears.

[*But* MARGARITA *makes no answer, her eyes still stubbornly upon the ground. Defeated,* SISTER

GRACIA *gives a sad little shrug to her shoulders and looks up.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Oh Dear God . . . !

[*Then she moves away, and taking her knitting from her pocket works as she stands there. After a moment,* MARGARITA *says in a hard voice.*]

MARGARITA. He'll have no father. He'll have no mother.

SISTER GRACIA. No mother, did you say? Did you say that? D'you mean you're thinking that you'll turn your back on him and leave him here . . . as these poor wretched women leave their children?

[*She has dropped her work and is so vehement, so shaken with indignation, that* MARGARITA *gets up, a little frightened.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Oh no, no! You can't mean that . . . you couldn't do such an infamous thing. To give up your child altogether . . . oh, think . . . think! No, you couldn't do it . . . you couldn't. Promise me that you'll take him with you . . . and give him your name . . . and the love that he has a right to. Promise me.

MARGARITA. I can't.

SISTER GRACIA. Why not?

MARGARITA. My father knows nothing about it. We've told him that I've a vocation for the Sisterhood and he thinks that I'm here on probation. If he knew, he'd die of the shame of it.

SISTER GRACIA. And your mother . . . ?

MARGARITA. I've no mother. I've a step-mother.

SISTER GRACIA. She knows?

MARGARITA. Yes, she knows. She has helped me deceive my father and hide here. Not that she cares much for me! But at least she's a woman . . . and understands.

SISTER GRACIA. A woman, is she . . . and understands? Understands what? Has she never had children . . . ?

[*At this moment* SISTER FELICIANA *comes across the*

back of the patio carrying some letters. On seeing her MARGARITA *begins to tremble with excitement and runs to her crying.*]

MARGARITA. Sister Feliciana . . . is that the post . . . is there anything for me?

SISTER FELICIANA. I'm sure I don't know. The Superior will give it you soon enough if there is.

[*She is going her way, but* MARGARITA *desperately catches at her habit.*]

MARGARITA. Oh, for the love of God, let me see them. I won't ask you for the letter . . . I won't indeed. I only want to know. Oh . . . please . . . won't you? Oh . . . I'll go on my knees . . .

SISTER FELICIANA. But . . . !

[*While* MARGARITA *kneels and clings to her, she questions* SISTER GRACIA *with a look, which says, "Is this girl mad?"*]

SISTER GRACIA. Let her look.

[MARGARITA, *when she gets the letters, runs through them with feverish anxiety and passes from hope to despondency and to despair.*]

MARGARITA. No . . . yes? No . . . no . . . no! Nothing . . . oh, my God . . . nothing!

SISTER FELICIANA. Well . . . God's will be done, you know.

[*She philosophically packs the letters together again and departs. But* MARGARITA *is left like a mad creature.*]

MARGARITA. Nothing . . . nothing . . . nothing!

SISTER GRACIA. My child, my child . . . keep calm.

MARGARITA. Not one word! I'm not worth even a word from him . . . and I've brought myself to this for him. He knows where I am . . . he knows . . . oh, he knows!

SISTER GRACIA. [*To say something.*] He'll write tomorrow.

MARGARITA. He won't. I shall die here . . . alone.

For he doesn't love me . . . he never did. I was the one . . . I . . . oh, God help me!

[*She breaks down again, sobbing helplessly.* SISTER GRACIA *goes to her and says gently.*]

SISTER GRACIA. There, there now . . . don't think of that any more.

[*Suddenly* MARGARITA *stops crying and looks fixedly in front of her.*]

MARGARITA. He's wicked and heartless . . . everybody says that. Yes . . . wicked! No . . . no, he's not. It's only that he doesn't love me. And I didn't know how to make him love me. But there were those that did. Well . . . what more could I do? I gave myself to him, body and soul . . . and even that wasn't enough. For he was false to me. Oh, those women that took him away from me! And when I cried, all he said was . . . "But if you really loved me." [*She echoes distractedly.*] "If you really loved me! If you really loved me!"

[*She has ranged through tears and anger to the climax of an almost hysterical scream. And now she gets up and goes up to* SISTER GRACIA.]

MARGARITA. You don't know what it is to be jealous.

SISTER GRACIA. I never want to know.

MARGARITA. It's hell. It's like being burnt alive. It's like having one's heart torn out. "If you really loved me." Ay de mi . . . ay de mi! As if I didn't . . . better than anyone else would.

SISTER GRACIA. [*Very moved.*] Yes . . . yes. Keep quiet now.

MARGARITA. For haven't I risked salvation . . . look what I've brought on myself just to please him. And I cried . . . I prayed God I might die . . . and it meant nothing to him. But there was one day . . . yes, just one . . . when he did love me. And I tell you, I'd lose my soul and see him lose his, to have that day over again!

SISTER GRACIA. Don't blaspheme!

MARGARITA. Oh, I tell lies about it all . . . I do noth-

ing but lie. For I'm not sorry for the sin and the shame of it . . . I'm not. If he wants me, what do I care about honour or dishonour . . . he's my life . . . I've no other.

SISTER GRACIA. Be quiet . . . be quiet, I tell you. Are you mad . . . or do you want to lose your last hope of salvation?

[MARGARITA *loses all self control whatever. She clings hysterically to* SISTER GRACIA *and kneels to her without in the least knowing who she is.*]

MARGARITA. Where is he? For the love of God where is he? Tell me where he is so that I can go to him . . . barefoot . . . on my knees. . . .

SISTER GRACIA. Let me go.

MARGARITA. Carlos . . Carlos! We're here . . . both of us . . . your child . . . and I'm here. Carlos . . . love . . . life . . . Carlos . . .

[*She falls to the ground in a violent fit of hysterics.* SISTER GRACIA *is really alarmed, and calls out.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Help . . . help!

[ENRIQUE *comes in by one door, and by the other* SISTER FELICIANA.]

ENRIQUE. What is it . . . what has happened?

SISTER FELICIANA. Who was that calling . . . ah!

[*She goes to succour* MARGARITA, *while* SISTER GRACIA, *very distressed, hardly knowing what she is saying, crying indeed like a child, just manages to get out.*]

SISTER GRACIA. This woman . . . this woman . . . !

ENRIQUE. There now . . . don't be frightened . . . it's nothing.

[*He lifts up* MARGARITA, *who grows quieter, little by little, sighing out "Ay . . . ay," and gradually getting some control over herself. He takes the glass of water that has been left by the trough and gives it to* SISTER FELICIANA *saying.*]

ENRIQUE. Sprinkle a few drops in her face. Keep quiet,

girl, keep quiet. Hysterics are over, I think. Now get on your feet.

[SISTER FELICIANA *helps her up.*]

ENRIQUE. That's right. Now take care you don't begin again . . . d'you understand?

[*Though he talks to* MARGARITA *he is looking rather anxiously at* SISTER GRACIA, *who is leaning against one of the pillars still crying though she tries to control herself.*]

MARGARITA. Yes . . . I will . . .

ENRIQUE. [*Taking a little bottle from his pocket.*] Take a sniff of this. And now you're all right . . . wasn't anything serious, was it? [*To* SISTER FELICIANA.] Now . . . take her to her room . . . give her a little orange flower water . . . shut out the sun, and keep her quiet.

SISTER FELICIANA. Come along then . . . don't cry any more.

[*She takes* MARGARITA *away and* SISTER GRACIA, *hardly herself even yet, is instinctively following them, when* ENRIQUE, *gently authoritative, stops her.*]

ENRIQUE. Where are you going?

SISTER GRACIA. I . . . I was going with them.

ENRIQUE. No.

SISTER GRACIA. Why not?

ENRIQUE. Because it's quite possible that in a moment she'll have another attack . . . and you may have one too if you're there.

SISTER GRACIA. I?

ENRIQUE. Yes . . . these nervous crises are very contagious things . . . Besides you're thoroughly upset . . . you're shaking all over. Sit down.

SISTER GRACIA. But. . . .

ENRIQUE. Sit down, please. Doctor's orders.

[SISTER GRACIA *sits down and after a moment tries to speak. But she is still so upset that she hardly knows what she is saying.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Blessed Jesus . . . that poor girl . . . she seemed possessed . . .

ENRIQUE. Don't talk . . . rest. Close your eyes a moment.

[*She obeys him. He then begins to walk up and down, but going no nearer to her. After a moment she says.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Can I open them now?

ENRIQUE. Are you quite yourself again?

SISTER GRACIA. Yes, I am.

ENRIQUE. Quite?

SISTER GRACIA. Quite. Don't be afraid . . . I've never had hysterics yet.

[*She gets up as if to go. Then he moves a step nearer.*]

ENRIQUE. Sister Gracia. [*Struck by his tone she looks at him curiously.*] How old are you?

SISTER GRACIA. Oh . . . really, I hardly remember. Twenty-nine, I ought to be, I think, on my next birthday. Yes . . . that's it. Ten years I've been professed . . . and I was eighteen.

ENRIQUE. You've been here since you were eighteen?

SISTER GRACIA. Oh no . . . I've only been here four years and a half. I started in an Asylum for old men. Oh, poor old things . . . if you knew how miserable it made me to leave them . . . really it was almost worse than leaving my own home. They were so fond of me . . . and I was of them. Hard luck they'd all had! And they were so old . . . and I was such a child. They used to pretend . . . some of them . . . that I was their granddaughter . . . and sometimes I'd find myself thinking of them as if they were my dolls. Such fun we used to have together!

ENRIQUE. There's not much fun to be had here.

SISTER GRACIA. I think that all the sorrow in the world is to be found here. These women . . . I don't know whether it makes me more wretched to have them suffer

so . . . or for them to think nothing of it at all. And the babies . . . the ones that are born here . . . and those that they bring here . . . outcasts every one . . . with people only thinking how best they can be rid of them . . . as if they were something unclean and shameful altogether. And . . . oh, my God . . . a month ago, while you were away . . . one night when I was on duty, someone put a dead child into the basket at the gate. That is . . . it hadn't died—its throat was cut. I shall never forget it. With big blue wide open eyes that seemed to be asking . . . But why . . . but why?

ENRIQUE. This can't go on, you know, Sister Gracia.

SISTER GRACIA. What do you mean?

ENRIQUE. You can't stay on here.

SISTER GRACIA. Where?

ENRIQUE. Surrounded by this misery and pain . . . misery of the body and of the spirit too. For you're right . . . the whole world's unhappiness is centred here . . . we're at the very heart of its corruption. Vice or cowardice it may be . . . degeneracy, self-will . . . but over it all, despair. For what have they to look forward to . . . any of them?

SISTER GRACIA. I know, I know . . . there's nothing . . . and that's what is so horrible. My poor old men now . . . who cared what became of them? But it was so easy to take them out of themselves . . . why, if I'd promised them the moon to play with, they'd have felt quite sure of getting it . . . because I'd promised. But these wretched souls . . . what visions can one give to them? Some of them are callous, and some only wish they were dead, and some just want to be revenged. But there's not one . . . not one that even *wants* to rise above it all. And, if they did . . . what could we promise them? They leave here . . . and what is waiting for them? More misery . . . more hunger . . . more vice . . . more shame. Do you know, I think sometimes . . . oh, not very often, but sometimes I can't help thinking . . . that if one of these women would only lift up her head, take her child in her arms,

and outface what the world calls her dishonour . . . why, God at least would forgive her. For he always does forgive us if we call on him. But then . . . they don't know how to call on him. How should they? No one has taught them. They hardly know that he exists. Then how can one sin against a God one doesn't know? And if they've not knowingly sinned . . . how should they feel the shame, and why . . . oh why . . . should such punishment fall upon them? God . . . God . . . but who is to blame then for so much misery?

ENRIQUE. Sister Gracia . . . Sister Gracia!

SISTER GRACIA. What am I saying . . . what have I said? Oh, forget it please. And God forgive me . . . blessed Jesus! . . . thy will be done . . . and as you have willed it . . . then so it should be. As it is . . . it is right . . . although we cannot understand. Have pity on us and forgive us all . . . Lord . . . Lord!

ENRIQUE. But . . . why are you crying then?

SISTER GRACIA. Oh, indeed I'm not . . . well . . . no, I'm not quite myself yet. That girl . . . like a mad creature . . . like some fury from another world. You mustn't think I'm generally so impressionable as this. But today . . . well, you'll forgive such foolishness . . . and . . . another time. . . .

[*She starts to go.*]

ENRIQUE. Wait . . . wait a little.

SISTER GRACIA. No, really . . . there is so much to be done. . . .

ENRIQUE. Wait . . . please . . . just for a minute. I want to speak to you . . . of something that may touch you very nearly.

SISTER GRACIA. That may touch me . . . !

ENRIQUE. Well then . . . that does touch *me* very, very nearly . . . that means more to me than anything in the world. [*At a gesture from her.*] No . . . for God's sake don't be offended.

SISTER GRACIA. Let me go, please.

ENRIQUE. You guess what it is?

SISTER GRACIA. No.

ENRIQUE. Ah . . . but you do. [*He is deeply moved for all that he speaks quietly and stands very still; she, trembling rather, stands as still, to listen.*] Sister Gracia . . . you can't go on leading this life. How can you endure to be sunk here in this pit of bitterness and despair? Well then . . . I can't endure that you should be. For three years now I've been coming here and seeing you every day . . . and from the first day I've cared for you . . .

SISTER GRACIA. Oh, God in heaven, don't say that . . . hush, hush!

ENRIQUE. Why? I have cared for you . . . felt for you more and more . . . and more deeply. For you are all that I believe a woman should be . . . you are good, you are true, you have sense . . . and you are full of joy . . . you were when I knew you first. And if you're unhappy now . . . why then, indeed, you are not yourself. You are a sick woman now.

SISTER GRACIA. I . . . !

ENRIQUE. Yes . . . the foul breath of this place has poisoned you. All the tears that you have seen shed are heavy on your heart. And all the suffering you've seen and all the blasphemies you've heard have beaten back into your body and your mind. But you need the bright sky above you and the fresh air to breathe . . . and on your horizon some gleams of hope.

SISTER GRACIA. No, no . . . oh, no!

ENRIQUE. Yes, yes . . . and that's what I bring you when I bring you . . . my love.

SISTER GRACIA. Oh, for God's sake. . . .

ENRIQUE. My love. We must call things by their names.

SISTER GRACIA. And you dare to speak to me of love . . . here . . . where we see how it all ends.

ENRIQUE. It isn't love that comes to such an end . . .

that has eaten like a cancer into these lives. True love between men and women is health and strength to both.

SISTER GRACIA. That is enough!

[*And she turns away determinedly.*]

ENRIQUE. No, don't go away . . . listen . . . there's nothing I'm saying that need offend you. Love that is worthy of the name brings peace of mind and harmony . . . clear thoughts and steadfastness. And work to be done . . . and shared . . . oh, anxious hours enough . . . but with their burden lightened by just half. Day after day of toil and weariness . . . but at the end of each the comfort of a heart that beats near yours. Come out of this prison and learn to laugh again. Take off that habit which is black like death and that coif . . . it's like the cloth that you lay on a dead woman's face . . . and honour me by trusting me to make you happy.

SISTER GRACIA. I am happy. God knows it.

ENRIQUE. But won't you be as happy with me? And I should be so happy with you. Ah . . . forgive that from a man who really isn't used to being selfish. I'm not offering you what's called a life of pleasure . . . mine's austere. I'm not well off, and I'm a doctor and you'd be brought close enough, if you were my wife, to all the ills of mankind. Don't be afraid that you'd have no chance of doing good. I live for my work . . . and though I don't worship science for its own sake . . . I do believe it can help me to help my neighbour. Won't you help me too? You have grown wise in charity. Working together we could give such life to our work . . . won't you try? I'm a free man . . . and you are free . . .

SISTER GRACIA. I . . . free! How can you say that?

ENRIQUE. Why, you wouldn't be the first to leave the hard road you chose when you were young and full of illusions for a simpler way . . . the human way, you know, that love makes easier.

SISTER GRACIA. I have given my love once and for all.

I abide by that vow. I live for that love and I will die in it.

ENRIQUE. Sister Gracia. . . .

SISTER GRACIA. Oh yes, you're right . . . I am unhappy . . . unhappier than you can think. And I'm tired, and perhaps I'm ill . . . poisoned . . . oh no doubt, as you say. But God, who has my love, is with me. I may not see him, but he is with me. And while I love him he will not leave me. Oh yes, it's true that just now he has put bitterness in the cup . . . but he has given me so much other happiness . . . that I have so little deserved. And he will again . . . I know that he will. And even if he does not I have given myself for ever.

ENRIQUE. Sister Gracia . . .

SISTER GRACIA. For ever . . . for ever. And no one has the right to try and turn me from my way. My love and my sorrow are my God's. No, don't speak and don't come near me. Don't ever speak or ever think of this again.

ENRIQUE. Is that your last word?

SISTER GRACIA. My last . . . and my only one. Good-bye.

[*She is more than a little shaken by all this, by the violence she is doing to herself. Once again she turns to go.*]

ENRIQUE. Well, at least let me as a doctor give you some advice. I really think you are ill . . . you are worn out.

SISTER GRACIA. Don't let that trouble you. The Superior is responsible for my good health. What I need she will order. Good-bye.

ENRIQUE. Good-bye.

[*He bows and goes without turning his head.* SISTER GRACIA *turns now to go out on the left and so she has to cross the whole patio. She is quite broken with emotion and physical fatigue; she moves very*

slowly and rests wherever she can, by a tree, a chair, a pillar. Half way across she can hear the impudent, sensual voice of CANDELAS *singing.*]

I asked a sick man the complaint
Of which he was to die,
"Of loving you . . . of loving you,"
The sick man made reply.

[SISTER GRACIA *stops to listen and there comes over her, like an agony, all the temptation of love and its happiness. She wrings her hands, then crosses them on her breast, and stands there trembling. Then she lets her arms fall and stands for a moment with closed eyes. Then she pulls herself together, takes the crucifix from her sleeve, looks at it for a little, presses it to her breast and says*:]

SISTER GRACIA. Jesus . . . beloved saviour . . . do not leave me without help!

[*She starts on her way again, and, as she reaches the door, meets the* SUPERIOR *coming out.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Sister Cristina.

SISTER CRISTINA. What is it? Why, what's the matter? You're shaking all over. Are you ill?

SISTER GRACIA. No, indeed. But I want to ask a favour. Will you be so kind as to write today . . . today, please . . . to the authorities and ask them if they will transfer me. . . .

SISTER CRISTINA. But. . . .

SISTER GRACIA. Please . . . please! I want to leave here at once . . . and without anyone knowing . . . or knowing where I go! I beg you . . . for the love of God! It is a case of conscience . . .

CURTAIN

ACT III

The kitchen of an Orphanage. It is a large white-washed room, divided in two by a wooden barrier. In the back part, which is a little higher than the front, separated from it not only by the barrier but by one or two steps, is a great stove with large saucepans fitted into it; and they have taps in them. On the ground, close to the stove, are four large two-handled pots.

The front of the room is arranged as a dining-room, with tables and benches of plain deal. There are two of these tables, one on each side of the room.

In the wall on the right is a large doorway; the door stands open all the time and through it one can catch a glimpse of the great patio. In the left wall are two smaller doors which lead to other dining-rooms, one for the girls, the other for the little boys; it is the big boys that eat in the kitchen.

At the back are high windows through which trees and sky can be seen. Beneath the windows is a shrine, and in it an image of the Virgin and Child. Two flower-pots with artificial flowers also adorn the shrine. SISTER DIONISIA *is in the kitchen; a Sister of Charity, aged about 35, a country woman, uneducated and taciturn, but full of common sense and sturdy practical virtue, possessing too, great physical powers of work. She is by the stove and has just finished putting the four large pots in a row.*

ENGRACIA *and* LORENZA *come in carrying a deal box with cord handles which is full of hunks of bread. They are inmates of the orphanage, very poorly dressed, cotton skirts, hemp sandals, sleeved aprons of striped cloth, and on their heads cotton handkerchiefs which they take off once they are in the kitchen, and tie loosely round their necks.* ENGRACIA *is very pretty and delicate in her movements,* LORENZA *is a rather ugly country girl.*

ENGRACIA. Here's the bread for supper.

[*They carry the box, which they had dropped for the moment while they untied the handkerchiefs from their heads, towards the door.*]

SISTER DIONISIA. You've cut very little.

LORENZA. [*Sullenly.*] That's all the bread there was.

[*To this* SISTER DIONISIA *makes no reply.* LORENZA *and* ENGRACIA *start taking out the bread with two great metal scoops, and putting it into the four great pots.*]

SISTER DIONISIA. Put a few extra in that . . . it's the little ones'.

LORENZA. Yes, Sister.

ENGRACIA. [*Looking at the stove.*] Is the water hot?

LORENZA. Not boiling yet.

SISTER DIONISIA. Lots of time . . . it's only four o'clock.

ENGRACIA. I'll go and fetch the plates.

[*She goes out by one of the doors on the left.*]

SISTER DIONISIA. Get the ladle . . . and we'll put in the dripping.

[LORENZA *takes out of a cupboard in the corner the vessel containing the dripping, and a large iron ladle.*]

SISTER DIONISIA. Take care you don't burn yourself.

[LORENZA *starts to ladle in the dripping. Then she stops, surprised.*]

LORENZA. Sister Dionisia!

[SISTER DIONISIA *knows what the matter is, and in self defence looks severe.*]

SISTER DIONISIA. What's the matter?

LORENZA. You've forgotten the peppers.

SISTER DIONISIA. No, I've not forgotten them.

LORENZA. Oh yes, Sister. Look, the dripping's not coloured at all.

SISTER DIONISIA. I tell you I've not forgotten them . . . there aren't any.

[LORENZA, *horror struck, puts down the dripping and stands with the ladle in the air.*]

LORENZA. No peppers!

SISTER DIONISIA. [*Ill-humouredly, to hide her own vexation.*] No, child, there aren't any. We used up the last this morning.

LORENZA. Well . . . we needn't waste time making the broth then . . . for they won't eat it.

SISTER DIONISIA. What else can they do . . . if it's all there is?

LORENZA. I know the big boys won't eat it. They'll go to bed starving. If there aren't peppers in the broth . . . they won't eat it.

SISTER DIONISIA. Come along now . . . the dripping will be cold . . . and if it's put with the bread like that the whole thing turns to glue.

[*She goes on apportioning the dripping to the pots.* LORENZA *puts it in while* SISTER DIONISIA *stirs it.* ENGRACIA *now comes back with a pile of tin plates which she puts on the table.*]

ENGRACIA. The plates!

[*And she goes out again.*]

SISTER DIONISIA. Now, put the lids on.

[*She carries the dripping back to its corner.*]

LORENZA. If you've things to do we'll look after the water boiling.

[ENGRACIA *comes back again with a basket full of tin mugs and wooden spoons.*]

SISTER DIONISIA. Well . . . even if it does boil don't pour it out or you'll burn yourselves . . . you'd better call me. I'm going to the bakehouse to see if they've done kneading.

[*She goes out through the wide open door.* ENGRACIA *has been setting out the plates, with a mug and a spoon by each.*]

ENGRACIA. [*Mocking.*] The table's laid . . . the silver plate is on.

LORENZA. [*Coming from the back.*] And as for the banquet . . . why, the King himself never had the like. Bread soaked in hot dripping just for a change . . . and no peppers with it either.

ENGRACIA. I don't know which way makes me sicker . . . with them or without them.

LORENZA. [*Philosophically good-humoured.*] My child, when you can dip your bread in good pepper broth that turns it red, at least you can pretend that it tastes of sausage.

ENGRACIA. Sausage! You're a nice one.

LORENZA. Oh my . . . what wish would I have if. . . ! Now look . . . suppose the blessed Saint Cayetano were to work a miracle, so that when we put in the ladle instead of bringing out hunks of bread and water we got . . . sausages . . . and boiled codfish . . . or beans and bacon . . . or lentils. Holy Mother, I want to forget there's such a thing as lentils in this world.

[ENGRACIA *is sitting on a bench, her elbows on the table, looking fixedly at some sort of little card she has taken from her pocket.*]

ENGRACIA. Oh . . . there are such a lot of things in this world that you want to forget about.

LORENZA. What's that you're looking at?

ENGRACIA. Nothing . . . a picture out of a match-box.

LORENZA. Let's see. [*She takes it and reads.*] "Juanita la Serana." Oh, my dear . . . isn't she handsome? Is she an actress?

ENGRACIA. Yes . . . one of those that sing and dance and have motor-cars and silk dresses!

LORENZA. And how her hair's done! Now who is it she looks like?

ENGRACIA. Like me.

LORENZA. [*Scandalised.*] Like you! Well . . . yes she is . . . if you wore your hair right high up like she does . . . and your skirts short. Oh . . . !

ENGRACIA. What are you laughing at?

LORENZA. Oh . . . think of all the lentils you could have to eat, if you were an actress with your picture put on match-boxes.

ENGRACIA. Hold your tongue . . . someone's coming.

LORENZA. Only the Innocent.

ENGRACIA. Here . . . give it me!

[ENGRACIA *seizes the picture and puts it back in her pocket.* THE INNOCENT *comes in. She is what is sometimes called a "natural," a grown woman with the undeveloped brain of a child. She has however an old woman's face and her hair is grey and bristly. She is dressed like the other orphans. As she comes in she produces a screw of greasy paper, and takes from it after a moment the drumstick of a chicken.*]

THE INNOCENT. Girls . . . want some chicken?

LORENZA. [*In fascinated amazement.*] Chicken!

THE INNOCENT. [*With all the pride of great possession.*] Chicken! Don't it smell good. [*She holds it close to* LORENZA'S *nose, and as suddenly snatches it away again.*] Ah . . . don't you wish you may get it! [*Then turning generous.*] All right . . . take it, greedy. But don't eat it all . . . give her a bit . . . she looks pretty hungry.

LORENZA. [*To* ENGRACIA.] Have some?

ENGRACIA. [*In great disgust.*] No, thank you!

THE INNOCENT. Not like chicken! Have a cutlet.

[*She now produces from the screw of paper a cutlet bone with a little meat left on it.* ENGRACIA *looking upon this no more favourably she goes on cheerfully.*]

THE INNOCENT. Try some fish!

[*And out comes a bit of fried fish.*]

ENGRACIA. No, no . . . take it away.

THE INNOCENT. [*Amazed.*] No? Well, have a sweet?

ENGRACIA. [*A little moved.*] Oh . . . well . . . perhaps.

THE INNOCENT. Here you are . . . cokernut!

[ENGRACIA *takes the sweet delightedly, puts it to her mouth, then takes it away again.*]

ENGRACIA. Oh, no . . . it makes me sick!

THE INNOCENT. What . . . the sweet too!

ENGRACIA. [*With growing excitement.*] The sweet too . . . and everything else besides. Yes, I'm hungry . . . like everybody else here . . . well, I was . . . oh no, I'm not. I haven't been able to get through a meal for these two days . . . and it does turn me sick to see you with all that. Goodness knows I'd like something to eat . . . but not food! I'd like something very sour and very sweet . . . and cold . . . no, hot . . . oh, I don't know. Coffee with lots of sugar! Salad with lots of vinegar! No, nothing to eat . . . I'd like to sleep. Mother Mary, if I could go to bed this very minute and not ever have to get up again. For oh, I am sleepy!

LORENZA. [*With rough kindness.*] Now you just listen to me. People that don't eat, die . . . and that's what's going to happen to you . . . going on like this. And I tell you . . . that if you throw your supper under the bench again I'll tell Sister Dionisia, so I will . . . and she'll get it down you . . . see if she doesn't!

[ENGRACIA *bursts into tears.*]

LORENZA. Oh . . . don't cry!

ENGRACIA. Let me be!

LORENZA. Where are you off to?

ENGRACIA. Let me alone, can't you?

[*She goes to the end of the table, sits down, hides her face in her hands, and quietly proceeds to have her cry out.* LORENZA, *much distressed, turns to the* INNOCENT.]

LORENZA. There . . . she's all upset again. Some days she fires up at you because she's sure she must be a Marquis's daughter . . . or why are her hands so white, and her feet so something or other? Other times she's wild because she can't go on the stage! And last night in the dormitory she jumped out of bed in her sleep and was walking about

with her eyes tight shut . . . a bit more and she'd have been out of the window. She's going off her head . . . that's what I think.

THE INNOCENT. Where's the sweet? Don't let it get lost.

[*She takes the sweet from the table where it has dropped—it is a sugar-coated one—and gazes at it almost with adoration.*]

THE INNOCENT. Yes, you'd like it yourself, wouldn't you? Don't you wish you may get it? But it's for Morenito. [*She fishes out another.*] Though this is even nicer . . . it's got rum inside.

LORENZA. Where did you get all this?

[THE INNOCENT *carefully puts the sweet away again and screws up her parcel.*]

THE INNOCENT. Don't you tell the Superior! I went out to take a letter to the Warden's daughter's sweetheart who's from Madrid, and stopping at the New Inn. And the cook there said she'd make me a present . . . because they'd had a big dinner on for the Town Council. Oh, my girl . . . but don't they just stuff themselves! Rice . . . chicken . . . cutlets . . . fish . . . ham in syrup . . . cheese! And all because a gentleman they call a Minister has come down . . . and they'd made him a free something or other of the city . . . and then this morning to celebrate it they've given him a funeral.

LORENZA. [*Amazed.*] A funeral!

THE INNOCENT. Well, it must have been. They put him in a coach and took him all through the streets in a procession . . . and there's been a stone put up with his name on it in gold letters . . . just like the ones in the cemetery. And they hung wreaths . . . and everybody was in black clothes and high hats . . . all the Council and the Mayor . . . and the College professors and the Governor of the province and the Bishop. And I suppose it was just to make it all not seem so dreadful that they gave him a dinner. And there's a bull-fight too . . . just for him.

They've gone there now. And, what's more . . . Juan de Dios, that used to be here, is fighting.

ENGRACIA. Juan de Dios!

THE INNOCENT. Look here . . . it says so.

[*She produces a crumpled handbill and they all three scan it excitedly.*]

ENGRACIA. The Bull-ring. . . .

LORENZA. In honor of His Excellency. . . .

ENGRACIA. Six magnificent bulls. . . .

LORENZA. Bull fighters. . . .

THE INNOCENT. Here . . . here!

ENGRACIA. . . . whose place will be taken by Juan de Dios Garcia, the Foundling . . . from the Orphanage of San Vincente de Paolo.

LORENZA. From our orphanage . . . does it put that?

THE INNOCENT. Yes . . . and he made them put it . . . so as to show that he wasn't ashamed of being brought up here.

ENGRACIA. [*Enviously.*] Fancy flourishing it back at them like that when they meant it as a disgrace. Foundling! And perhaps his father will be watching him fight . . . and he may see him killed! He'll be one of those in a black coat and a high hat who's been at the dinner. Foundling! That's what I'll call myself, Engracia the Foundling . . . and if I'm a success I'll make some of the gentlemen in high hats pay pretty dear for the use of the name. Foundling! Foundling!

[*Most of this is muttered between her teeth. Meanwhile from the patio the sound of a quarrel can be heard; a man's voice, unsteady, half sober; a boy's, high in indignation; and the frightened cries of a child. This is* MORENITO. *It is* VICENTE *that calls out, "What are you up to . . . hitting a child like that?" and* POLICARPO *that replies, "I'll hit him if I choose. Take that! I'll learn you to laugh at me . . . on the other side of your mouth!" Then* MORENITO *screams again.*]

ENGRACIA. What's the matter . . . what's happening?

[*The three girls all rush to the door.*]

LORENZA. It's that tailor! He's thrashing one of the little ones . . .

THE INNOCENT. It's Morenito! [*She calls out in great distress.*] Morenito . . . Morenito . . . come here.

[MORENITO, *a little boy of 10 who seems even younger he is so pallid and fragile, runs helplessly in.* POLICARPO, *the tailor, is close at his heels. He is a hunchback, a drunkard, debased, almost ape-like in his movements.* VICENTE *comes too, one of the orphans, a well set up boy of 16.*]

VICENTE. . . . And I'll break your head open because *I* choose. So now!

POLICARPO. [*In great disdain.*] Oh, you will, will you?

VICENTE. Yes, I will. Let that child alone. Let him alone, I tell you.

[MORENITO *yells with terror.*]

VICENTE. Will you let him alone . . . ?

[VICENTE *sends* POLICARPO *flying. He staggers and falls against the screen.* MORENITO *escapes and takes refuge with the* INNOCENT, *who comforts and pets him, and stops his crying by giving him a sweet.* POLICARPO *struggles to his feet and scowls at the five of them.*]

POLICARPO. Scum! Charity brats!

VICENTE. D'you want another? Oh yes . . . you're plucky enough to hit a poor child like that . . . you won't stand up to a man.

POLICARPO. Him and you and all the lot of you . . . sons and daughters of trollops and thieves . . . that's what you are!

VICENTE. Say that again!

POLICARPO. I'll say it whenever I choose.

VICENTE. Say it again, and I'll throttle you.

POLICARPO. Aha . . . that gets you on the raw, does it? Yes, my lad . . . because it's true. You're the sons and daughters of . . .

[VICENTE, *with a yell, flings himself upon* POLICARPO. LORENZA *and the* INNOCENT *rush to separate them.* ENGRACIA *shouts with joy.*]

ENGRACIA. Throttle him, Vicente . . . throttle him!

LORENZA. Vicente . . . Vicente!

THE INNOCENT. Help . . . help!

ENGRACIA. Throttle him!

LORENZA. Now you be quiet!

[*While* MORENITO, *still quietly sobbing a little, looks on and sucks his sweet as if it were all no affair of his. At this moment* SISTER GRACIA *comes in.*

She is now an old lady of 70. She supports herself with a stick, suffers from rheumatism and wears spectacles, but she is lively and merry all the same. As a rule she speaks gently enough, but she can get excited and be very angry too. And happening on this quarrel she raps out with great authority.]

SISTER GRACIA. What's going on here? Policarpo! Vicente! Get away from each other at once. What is all this about?

[*The fighters separate.* LORENZA *and* ENGRACIA *hang their heads. Only* MORENITO, *feeling quite safe now that* SISTER GRACIA *is there, breaks out into renewed lamentations.*]

MORENITO. Aie . . . aie . . . aie! He hit me . . . so he did!

[*In response to* SISTER GRACIA'S *severely questioning look, both* POLICARPO *and* VICENTE *break out angrily.*]

VICENTE. The coward . . . he was thrashing the child. . . .

POLICARPO. The young blackguard . . . trying to throttle me!

MORENITO. Aie . . . aie . . . aie!

SISTER GRACIA. [*To* MORENITO.] Keep quiet now. [*Then she thumps the floor with her stick.*] Silence!

[*There is dead silence. Then she turns to* POLICARPO.]

SISTER GRACIA. Whatever could such a child do to you to make you ill-treat him like that? Answer me.

POLICARPO. [*Sullenly.*] What they all do . . . all the time. Sit idling and laughing in a man's face.

MORENITO. [*Perking up.*] He tries to make me learn to sew with a needle that's got no point.

POLICARPO. You broke the point, you mean . . . so that you needn't learn to sew.

MORENITO. [*To* SISTER GRACIA.] Oh . . . you tell him that's a lie. He gave me a needle that hadn't any point just so that I couldn't sew and then he hit me, he did . . . because he hates me because he says I called him a name. And I didn't call it him . . . and it's not a name, what's more . . . for it's true and everybody calls it him . . . the Sisters call it him. Policarpo the hunchback. Hunchie . . . hunchie . . . hunchie! [*He jumps up and down as he cries it out.*]

POLICARPO. See if I don't twist your neck for you!

SISTER GRACIA. Quiet now [*She raps with her stick again. The child's indignation amuses her, though she does her best to look severe.*] Morenito, I'm surprised at you. Go and stand this very minute with your face to the wall till you have learnt to be respectful to your elders. Is that the way a child should talk? Take care I don't shut you up in the cellar and let the rats eat you.

MORENITO. Aie . . . aie . . . aie!

SISTER GRACIA. And as for you, my good Mr. Tailor . . . I have told you a thousand times that the children are not to be beaten.

POLICARPO. Oh, I'll give him goodies!

SISTER GRACIA. When they misbehave you are to come and complain to me . . . and I will punish them as they deserve.

POLICARPO. Why . . . you and the Sisters are all the same . . . always backing them up . . . and so they do just as they please. A pretty state my workshop would get into if I didn't take them in hand a bit myself!

SISTER GRACIA. There are four workshops besides yours . . . and none of the other masters find they have to ill-treat the children before they can make them behave.

POLICARPO. Then they're cleverer than I am.

SISTER GRACIA. Or less fond of brandy perhaps.

POLICARPO. There you go . . . always bringing up the brandy against me.

SISTER GRACIA. Well, my friend . . . don't you put it down and then I shan't have to bring it up. Heavens . . . what a man!

POLICARPO. [*Muttering.*] Heavens . . . what an old woman!

SISTER GRACIA. What's that you say, you insolent fellow?

POLICARPO. [*Insolently indeed.*] What I do in my workshop is my own affair. I'm not the Sisters' servant. I'm an employee of the Board. Let's understand that.

SISTER GRACIA. Really. And have you never heard of an employee of the Board being out of employment sometimes?

POLICARPO. I've got some influence there though . . . and you may as well know it.

SISTER GRACIA. And so have I . . . and you may as well know it. You lay another finger upon one of these children and we'll see who counts for most . . . your friends the publicans, or mine in the Church. And now you take yourself out of my sight.

POLICARPO. So one's to treat these charity brats as if they were the sons of dukes. . . .

SISTER GRACIA. They are the sons of God . . . and that's a higher title still.

POLICARPO. [*To* MORENITO.] Oh, well . . . come along now, you little imp.

MORENITO. Aie . . . aie . . . aie!

SISTER GRACIA. No, Señor . . . he'll not go along . . . he'll stay here with me.

POLICARPO. Going to teach him his trade, are you?

SISTER GRACIA. That's no concern of yours.

POLICARPO. [*As he goes angrily to the door.*] Women's place is in the kitchen . . .

SISTER GRACIA. Quite so . . . and men's in the tavern . . . and there we have the world nicely divided up, haven't we? [*Then she turns to* VICENTE, *who has been standing quietly in a corner.*] And you now . . . what are you doing here?

VICENTE. [*A little uneasily.*] Nothing . . . oh, nothing. I was just walking across the patio. . . .

SISTER GRACIA. I know that. But how did you come to be walking across the patio at this time of day . . . past the tailor's shop where you have no business to be? Who gave you permission? Who opened the door for you?

[POLICARPO, *who had about disappeared, suddenly thrusts his head back with a jeering laugh.*]

POLICARPO. He didn't need it opened . . . he's got a key . . . a skeleton key . . . like a burglar.

[*After spitting this out he vanishes.*]

VICENTE. Curse him. . . .

[*He starts to pursue* POLICARPO, *but* SISTER GRACIA'S *voice brings him to a stand.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Stop! A skeleton key. Is that true?

VICENTE. [*Meekly.*] Yes, Señora.

SISTER GRACIA. [*Drily.*] Give it to me.

[VICENTE *takes a key from his pocket and hands it over.*]

VICENTE. Here it is.

SISTER GRACIA. And what are you doing with a skeleton key? Answer me.

[VICENTE *stands silent.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Let's see now. Oh . . . I understand. You come across the patio past the tailor's shop to

get to where the girls are working. So we have a sweetheart, have we? Answer. Who were you going to see? Don't make me angry now, Vicente, or it will be the worse for you. Who did you come here to see?

[VICENTE *looks on the ground and does not reply.* SISTER GRACIA *turns to the girls, who are a little disconcerted.*]

SISTER GRACIA. It'll be a miracle if you're not concerned in this, Engracia.

ENGRACIA. [*Hastily.*] No, Señora . . . it wasn't to see me . . . no, Señora, indeed.

SISTER GRACIA. But you know who it was. I can tell by your looks . . . all three of you know. Come along now . . . let's have it . . . quickly.

[*The three of them hang their heads and stay silent.* SISTER GRACIA, *with a gesture of impatience, raps on the ground with her stick.*]

MORENITO. [*Piping up from his corner.*] The Innocent won't say because Vicente has promised to stand her a glass of anisette presently.

[VICENTE *glances at the child as if he could murder him, but* MORENITO *goes on quite imperturbably.*]

MORENITO. But she knows . . . because she's the one that takes the letters to Paca. . . .

SISTER GRACIA. [*To* VICENTE.] To . . . to which Paca?

MORENITO. To little Paca . . . that works in the bakery . . . she's his sweetheart.

SISTER GRACIA. Send Paca here to me at once . . . and you [*To the girls.*] run along . . . run away.

[ENGRACIA *and* LORENZO *vanish precipitately, and the* INNOCENT *is following when* SISTER GRACIA *stops her.*]

SISTER GRACIA. No, no . . . you stay. I've to settle accounts with you too. Letters . . . glasses of anisette, indeed! A pretty business. This is what comes of trusting

you and letting you go out. You carry letters to Paca, do you?

MORENITO. [*Very pleased with himself.*] I took her one one day . . . and she baked me a little loaf of bread for it . . . all to myself.

SISTER GRACIA. Hold your tongue! Do you know what happens to children who speak when they're not spoken to? They have their tongues cut right out. Into the corner and down on your knees this very minute.

[MORENITO, *much taken aback, kneels down in the corner and weeps.* PAQUITA *appears in the doorway, a pretty girl of 17, dressed like the others. She is evidently a little troubled, but as evidently has her mind made up. She does not venture in, but stands, glancing sideways, first at* SISTER GRACIA *and then at* VICENTE.]

SISTER GRACIA. Come in . . . you.

[PAQUITA *comes in. The* INNOCENT, *who had retired to a corner, little by little, edges her way to* MORENITO, *and sits down on the floor to comfort him. After a while they are to be seen playing knucklebones together.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Well . . . [*Nodding to* VICENTE.] here he is. And can you tell me why he was making his way through the second patio by the help of a skeleton key?

PAQUITA. [*Seeing that denial is useless.*] Yes, Señora . . . to see me.

SISTER GRACIA. Well, I'm glad you confess it. You're pluckier about it than he is.

PAQUITA. [*With childish petulance.*] I suppose I love him better than he does me.

VICENTE. [*Just as childishly distressed.*] Oh . . . you've no right to say that!

PAQUITA. Well . . . if you're ashamed to say that you love me. . . .

VICENTE. I'm not . . . why should I be? And if I didn't tell, it was so as not to get you into trouble. And you know perfectly well that I love you every bit as much as you do me . . . and more, if it comes to that!

PAQUITA. [*With a shy smile.*] Well . . . if you say so . . .

[*It would seem that they had completely forgotten* SISTER GRACIA, *who with a burst of half humorous anger interrupts them.*]

SISTER GRACIA. That's right . . . that's all right, children! Go on sweethearting . . . don't attend to me! Well, this is the last straw!

VICENTE. Oh . . . we don't mean to be rude. But we . . . she . . . you see . . .

SISTER GRACIA. Yes, I see her . . . and I see you . . . and a pretty pair of noodles you are! And what do you think is going to happen now, I should like to know?

[*She starts to get up, and with her rheumatism that's not easy, so* PAQUITA *goes to help her. But with all the impatience of an old lady who hates to be reminded of her infirmities.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Let me be . . . let me be! Well . . . I like your impudence. One little angel of light mentions quite casually that he has made himself a skeleton key . . . and this girl confesses as calmly as you please that it's for clandestine meetings with her! And instead of being ashamed of yourselves and asking forgiveness . . .

PAQUITA. But it isn't a sin to love people.

SISTER GRACIA. But it's hardly a virtue, is it . . . to go making skeleton keys?

VICENTE. Oh . . . she knows I never wanted to.

PAQUITA. No . . . because you haven't the courage of a mouse.

SISTER GRACIA. [*Banging on the ground with her stick.*] Goodness gracious me . . . what a pair of children! May I ask if I'm to be allowed to get a word in edgeways?

VICENTE. Yes, Señora.

SISTER GRACIA. Much obliged, I'm sure! Well now . . . how long have you two been romancing like this?

VICENTE. It's since St. James day . . . that's the Warden's birthday . . . and Paquita went there with the Innocent to wait at table . . . and I was there seeing to the lock of the cupboard. And we started talking and I said to her . . .

SISTER GRACIA. Thank you. I can guess what you said to her . . . and what she answered.

PAQUITA. [*With great dignity.*] No, Señora . . . I didn't answer him at all till the Eve of Our Lady's Day, when I was in the bakehouse with the Innocent . . . and he came in with the chopped wood . . . and then I said. . . .

VICENTE. She said I could make the key.

SISTER GRACIA. Excellent! And now what happens?

PAQUITA. We're going to get married.

SISTER GRACIA. At once?

PAQUITA. Yes . . . just as soon as he can get fifty dollars to buy the furniture.

SISTER GRACIA. Oh . . . and then what?

PAQUITA. Then . . . ! We're used to going hungry. It won't be so bad to go hungry together.

VICENTE. And I'm sure I don't know why you need say you'll have to go hungry . . . when you know perfectly well you won't have to with me there to look after you. I can work . . . and though I say it that shouldn't, I know my trade with the best . . . I'm worth five pesetas a day anywhere. And I'd be earning it now and have the fifty dollars saved if it wasn't. . . .

SISTER GRACIA. That's the thing. Tomorrow we'll find you some work and we'll get you a lodging.

PAQUITA. What . . . send him away!

SISTER GRACIA. Yes, if you please. It doesn't suit me at all to have such a good locksmith living here.

VICENTE. [*To* PAQUITA.] There . . . what have I always told you!

PAQUITA. Send him away! Yes . . . you'll save your fifty dollars right enough . . . but who'll you spend them on then?

VICENTE. Why, whatever should I want fifty dollars for . . . but to spend it on you?

PAQUITA. Oh, you say that now . . .

VICENTE. I say it now . . . and I always shall . . . and God may strike me dead else.

SISTER GRACIA. [*Very angrily.*] And we've learnt to swear, have we? I've had enough of this. You be off to the bakehouse again . . . and you [*To* VICENTE.] get back to your work. Hurry up. Tomorrow I shall have a talk to the Warden about you . . . and that's the end of that.

VICENTE. [*Meekly.*] You won't tell him about the skeleton key, will you?

SISTER GRACIA. [*Pretending to be very angry.*] I shall tell him just exactly what I choose. Of all the impudence! Get along with you.

[VICENTE *and* PAQUITA *linger, gazing at each other.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Will you both be off . . . when I tell you?

VICENTE. [*Very meekly.*] Yes, Señora. [*He turns to go and then back to* PAQUITA *with . . .*] Goodbye, Paquita.

PAQUITA. [*As she turns away unresponsive.*] And a nice mess we've got into! This is what comes of trying to be happy!

[*As she goes out she meets* SISTER DIONISIA *in the doorway.*]

SISTER DIONISIA. Well . . . and where have you been hiding . . . and what about your oven? Oh, I beg pardon, Sister Gracia.

SISTER GRACIA. That's all right.

SISTER DIONISIA. May we serve supper? Come along . . . come along.

[*This last to* ENGRACIA *and* LORENZA *who are behind her with a basket filled with hunks of bread. They put it on the table, and join* SISTER DIONISIA *at the stove where they all three serve out the dripping-bread and broth.* SISTER GRACIA *sits down on a bench, crosses herself, and says a Paternoster in a low voice. On ending it, she takes a little stone from her pocket and throws it out into the patio.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Eah! The first Paternoster I've been able to say all day. [*Picking up the crucifix from her side and smiling at it lovingly.*] Ah . . . sweet Saviour, it's little time we get to talk to each other, you and I. But we're an old couple now.

[*She kisses the crucifix in simple affection, then, as in sudden reminder, turns to* SISTER DIONISIA.]

SISTER GRACIA. Sister Dionisia . . . did the peppers come?

[SISTER DIONISIA *leaves the girls at the stove.*]

SISTER DIONISIA. No, Señora.

SISTER GRACIA. Didn't you send for them?

SISTER DIONISIA. I went to the shop myself . . . with the Innocent.

SISTER GRACIA. And they wouldn't give them you?

SISTER DIONISIA. No . . . the man said that if it was for anyone of position or for the Sisters even he'd give credit . . . but that he wouldn't trust the Orphanage Board because they owed him for fourteen bags already and he's sure they won't pay.

SISTER GRACIA. God's will be done. But the flour . . . that came?

SISTER DIONISIA. Yes, Señora . . . yesterday afternoon.

SISTER GRACIA. Well . . . that's something.

SISTER DIONISIA. But you can't knead the dough it makes. Half of it's the commonest rye and half of it's nothing but bran. Just look what the bread's like.

[*She takes a bit of the black bread from the basket.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Mother of God!

SISTER DIONISIA. [*Lowering her voice.*] And there were cockroaches in some of the bags.

SISTER GRACIA. [*Her temper rising.*] Then it must all be sent back at once.

SISTER DIONISIA. But we sent it back last time . . . and it did no good. The contractor's on the Board, you know . . . and, as if that wasn't enough, his brother-in-law's the Party chairman.

SISTER GRACIA. I'm going to the Town Hall this very minute . . . and they shall hear what I have to say . . . yes indeed. Here . . . Innocent . . . give me my cloak . . . and you're to come too.

SISTER DIONISIA. You won't find anyone . . . they're all at the bull-fight.

SISTER GRACIA. That's true . . . oh, very well then.

[*She sighs. The* INNOCENT *who has jumped up, goes back to her corner.* LORENZA *comes from the stove to the bell-rope by the door.*]

LORENZA. Supper's ready. Shall I ring?

SISTER DIONISIA. [*To* SISTER GRACIA.] Do you think perhaps we'd better wait till everyone's back? Some of them, you know, had leave to go and stand near the bull-ring, to hear about the fight.

SISTER GRACIA. [*A little fussed.*] What? . . . oh yes . . . certainly, we'd better wait. To stand near the bull-ring! I don't like it a bit. They'll come back excited as usual . . . and so difficult . . .

[SISTER DIONISIA *is back at the stove.* ENGRACIA *and* LORENZA *stand looking out of the patio door, while* MORENITO *has come to sit at* SISTER GRACIA'S *feet.*]

SISTER DIONISIA. [*Half to herself.*] He's fighting today.

ENGRACIA. [*To* LORENZA.] And won't he be proud . . . all dressed up like that!

SISTER DIONISIA. Come along now . . . take the basket . . . put out the bread for the children. Innocent . . . you can come with me.

[ENGRACIA *and* LORENZA *carry off their basket and* SISTER DIONISIA *goes off by the other small door with the* INNOCENT. *Seated on her bench,* SISTER GRACIA, *though still a little fussed, begins to pray in a low voice, while* MORENITO, *at her feet, fingers her rosary and looks at her in silence for a little.*]

MORENITO. Are you saying your prayers?

[SISTER GRACIA *smiles and nods.*]

MORENITO. Are you praying for Juan de Dios to do well?

[SISTER GRACIA *still smiles.* MORENITO *hesitates a little and then asks a most important question.*]

MORENITO. Tell me . . . is there any Saint that was a bull-fighter?

[*At this moment a great noise of cheering begins to be heard. As it grows,* SISTER DIONISIA, ENGRACIA, LORENZA, *the* INNOCENT *and a lot of the girls come out of the other dining-rooms. The sound of the cheering comes nearer; the crowd is evidently in the patio itself by now, and one can hear the shouts of "Hurrah for Juan de Dios! Hurrah for the Foundling!" and* JUAN DE DIOS' *voice "Where's Reverend Mother?" and cries of "This way . . . she's here!"*]

SISTER GRACIA. What's all this . . . who's making all this noise? Go and see, Sister Dionisia.

[SISTER DIONISIA, *obeying, meets* JUAN DE DIOS *at the patio door.*]

JUAN DE DIOS. Where is she? Reverend Mother . . . Reverend Mother. . . .

SISTER DIONISIA. Oh . . . it's Juan de Dios!

[*And the girls cry out his name too. He is an attractive lad of 20, dressed in a bull-fighter's gala cos-*

tume, which has lost its freshness, for indeed it is one that he has hired for his first fight.]

JUAN DE DIOS. Sister Gracia . . . oh, Reverend Mother . . . where are you?

[*He runs and kneels at her feet and puts his arms round her waist.* SISTER GRACIA, *surprised and a little embarrassed, but very pleased, pushes him away, exclaiming.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Here . . . here! What is all this? Get away!

JUAN DE DIOS. I've come . . . oh, congratulate me!

SISTER GRACIA. Juan de Dios! There . . . get up.

[*He sits on the bench by her side. She leans on him a little.*]

JUAN DE DIOS. Why . . . what is it? You're not ill?

SISTER GRACIA. [*Smiling.*] No . . . no. . . .

MORENITO. [*Jealously, pulling at her skirts.*] Reverend Mother . . . Reverend Mother!

[*The girls at the back are all exclaiming among themselves, "Oh, what clothes!" "Oh, doesn't he look handsome!"*]

JUAN DE DIOS. The porter didn't want to let us in. A fine thing to have had the door shut in my face . . . today of all others!

[*Some of the bigger boys of the Orphanage that were with* JUAN DE DIOS *come in from the patio, some little ones come from the other dining-room. And the crowd that followed him helps fill up the patio door. And they all cheer him "Hurrah for the Foundling!"* JUAN DE DIOS *is beside himself with joy.*]

JUAN DE DIOS. D'you hear that . . . d'you hear that? "Hurrah for the Foundling!" And in the Bull-ring . . . you should just have heard them shouting it there. They threw me cigars and they threw their hats in . . . and all the beautiful young ladies in the boxes stood up and applauded me . . . they did. And before you can say 'knife' I'll have all Spain applauding me . . . and adoring me

. . . and shouting . . . every one of them . . . "Hurrah for the Foundling" . . . and that's me . . . that's me . . . who hadn't any father or a name of his own . . . but went hungry and cold . . . ! Oh, Reverend Mother, I have dreamed of this day . . . and I've kept myself for it . . . yes, I have . . . like one of God's blessed angels.

SISTER GRACIA. Hush, hush . . . don't talk like that.

JUAN DE DIOS. [*Very seriously.*] But I have . . . I swear it. And look here. . . .

[*He now proceeds to show* SISTER GRACIA *by a lively pantomime how he disposed of his bull, the present spectators cheering him at every point with cries of "Olé! Olé!" He pulls out his handkerchief for a muleta* (*the red cloth by which the bull is distracted*).]

JUAN DE DIOS. The muleta . . . so! One pass . . . over his head to blind him. Then a high one to get my position. That leaves me exposed . . . so four more over his head, quickly, one after another. Then one to turn him . . . one from down on my knees right at his horns. And then . . . the thrust! And you should have heard them shout. I tell you . . . they went mad! And if you had only been there too . . . with a white mantilla on . . . and I could have dedicated my bull to you.

SISTER GRACIA. Quiet . . . quiet . . . you heretic!

JUAN DE DIOS. But for all that, I've brought you . . . a present. Give it here . . . give it here.

[*One of the boys gives him something that is carefully wrapped up in a silk handkerchief.* SISTER GRACIA *hesitates a moment before she takes it.*]

JUAN DE DIOS. Take it . . . you deserve it . . . better than anyone else does. Open it . . . open it.

[SISTER GRACIA *undoes the handkerchief, and discloses a bull's ear . . . all bloody still.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Mother of God . . . what's this?

SISTER DIONISIA. [*Innocently.*] Why . . . it's an ear off a cow!

JUAN DE DIOS. [*Very offendedly.*] What d'you mean by a cow? It's the bull's ear, Señora . . . my bull that I killed . . . and this is his ear to prove it!

[*Once more the whole assemblage bursts into cheers.*]

JUAN DE DIOS. And there were fifty people at least came and asked me for it as a souvenir. But it's for you . . . just for you . . . to hang in your room . . . and everyone that sees it there will envy you.

SISTER GRACIA. Thank you . . . my son.

[*She cannot think what to do with her present, but* ENGRACIA *takes it and does it up again with the greatest care.*]

JUAN DE DIOS. And look . . . look at the tie-pin his Excellency threw me. Isn't it wonderful . . . isn't it, Sister Dionisia . . . and all of you . . . aren't you proud . . . and happy . . . isn't this a wonderful day for our Orphanage?

[*The boys and girls agree enthusiastically.*]

JUAN DE DIOS. But do look happy, Reverend Mother. [*He puts his arm round her and calls to the people in the doorway and out in the patio.*] For she is my mother . . . she is . . . she is! The other one left me in a basket on the doorstep . . . but she took me in and brought me up and cared for me. And Hurrah for our Reverend Mother . . . she's all the mother I ever want.

[*Tremendous cheering.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Be quiet now. Tell them all to be quiet.

JUAN DE DIOS. But why don't you look happy? Oh, . . . haven't you made up your mind yet to my being a bull-fighter? I know . . . I know! Oh wasn't she just set on my staying a carpenter all my life!

SISTER GRACIA. But suppose a bull kills you, my son?

JUAN DE DIOS. Well . . . if a bull kills me after I've done my duty by him, they'll give me a finer funeral than they would the Prime Minister.

SISTER GRACIA. Mother of God!

JUAN DE DIOS. And whether or no . . . I have a good time and everybody talks about me and all the women go mad about me and I get lots of money . . . yes, I'm going to be rich . . . do you know that? I got nothing for fighting today . . . because it was the first time. But I did so well that for next Sunday they're giving me a thousand pesetas . . . one thousand pesetas!

[*This creates an enormous sensation. The orphans stare and comment upon the marvel in low, impassioned tones. And* JUAN DE DIOS *adds impulsively.*]

JUAN DE DIOS. And fifty of them for you . . . and then Sister Dionisia can cook you such a dinner. Hurrah, girls, hurrah! Meat for dinner next Sunday!

[*They all cheer ecstatically.*]

JUAN DE DIOS. But I must be off . . . they're waiting for me. [*To* SISTER GRACIA.] Oh . . . come as far as the gate with me, so that everybody can see us together.

SISTER GRACIA. My son . . . I never heard of such a thing!

JUAN DE DIOS. Please . . . please . . . for it's the happiest day of my life. Good-bye, everybody . . . good-bye!

[ENGRACIA *suddenly darts up to him.*]

ENGRACIA. Well . . . good luck to you, Juan de Dios!

[SISTER GRACIA *lets him lead her to the door, where everyone makes way for them, and out into the patio, where the cheers are tremendous. "Hurrah for the Foundling! Hurrah for our Reverend Mother!" Gradually the crowd disperses and the cheers die away.* SISTER DIONISIA, *the girls, the little ones, and* MORENITO *are left in possession of the room.*]

SISTER DIONISIA. Come now . . . come everybody . . . back to work. Back to your refectory. [*Then to* LORENZA *and* ENGRACIA.] You can serve supper.

[ENGRACIA *does not stir.*]

SISTER DIONISIA. And what's the matter with you, stupid? D'you want to be a bull-fighter too? Ring the bell now.

[ENGRACIA *without a word goes to the bell-rope and pulls it.* MORENITO *likewise stands very aloof.*]

SISTER DIONISIA. And what's come to you, pray? Sit down in your place.

MORENITO. And aren't I a Foundling too?

[*He seats himself at the head of one of the tables. The bigger boys now begin to filter in again through the patio door. And in the further rooms can be heard the chatter of children who will have come in to their meal by some other way. The big boys talk and gesticulate excitedly as they make their way to their places at the table, jostling and stepping over each other or crawling even under the tables.*]

FIRST BOY. Get out . . .

SECOND BOY. Get out yourself!

THIRD BOY. Stop it, will you . . .

FIRST BOY. That's my place.

SISTER DIONISIA. [*Rapping upon the screen with a wooden spoon.*] Order there . . . order . . . keep order and silence. Take your proper places at once.

SECOND BOY. Precious stuck up, wasn't he?

FELIPE. And well he may be! He's going to get more rosettes off bulls yet . . . and make millions at it.

FIRST BOY. Well, we shall see . . . or perhaps we shan't!

FELIPE. We've seen enough to know, Señor!

SECOND BOY. Oh, don't tell me! He's only a phenomenon.

FIRST BOY. Anyone can be that!

FELIPE. Can they? Well, let's see anyone else that can give the last thrust like he did . . .

[*He proceeds to illustrate the way it was done and all the others applaud him with cries of "Olé! Olé!"*]

SISTER DIONISIA. Silence there!

FIRST BOY. Well . . . if he keeps on doing it that way see how long it'll be before he finds himself stuck on the horns of the bull.

FELIPE. Don't you believe it!

FIRST BOY. A bit of a suicide . . . that's what he'll be!

SECOND BOY. Still, he's a plucky fellow.

FIRST BOY. Being plucky isn't bull-fighting.

FELIPE. It's being a hero.

THIRD BOY. It's being a man anyhow.

SECOND BOY. Hurrah!

FIRST BOY. Oh, stop it!

SISTER DIONISIA. [*In despair.*] Now . . . now . . . now! Do sit down and be quiet . . . your supper's getting cold.

THIRD BOY. You know just as much about bull-fighting as a potato!

SECOND BOY. I know more than you do, anyway.

SISTER DIONISIA. Silence . . . silence! Now. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost . . . Amen.

[*And she crosses herself, as do the girls. Some of the boys do so, carelessly enough, and some go on talking.*]

FIRST BOY. I bet anything you like that he started in to kill the bull too soon . . .

SISTER DIONISIA. Silence!

[*And now she prays while the boys mumble after her.*]

SISTER DIONISIA. Bless, Lord, the food that we are about to receive. Preserve us from the sin of gluttony. And be thou unto us, by thy grace, the eternal food of our souls . . . Amen.

THE BOYS. [*In a hurry to begin talking again.*] Amen.

[LORENZA, ENGRACIA, *and the* INNOCENT *have been serving out the supper.*]

SISTER DIONISIA. Be careful with that saucepan now!

ENGRACIA. [*To a boy who has joggled it.*] Look here . . . you keep your hands to yourself.

THIRD BOY. Me!

ENGRACIA. Yes . . . you!

THIRD BOY. You're off your head, my dear!

FIRST BOY. Well . . . she's not all there anyway . . . poor girl!

ENGRACIA. Clumsy lout!

THIRD BOY. Why, how much more do you want of her?

SISTER DIONISIA. What's all that now? Don't you hear me tell you to be quiet?

FIRST BOY. Where's my bread?

THIRD BOY. Who's got my spoon?

MORENITO. Aie . . . they've taken my mug!

SISTER DIONISIA. Will you start your suppers . . . yes or no?

FELIPE. [*Having dipped his spoon in.*] Look here . . . what sort of stuff is this?

FIRST BOY. It's got no peppers in it!

[*And several of the boys repeat protestingly, "No peppers! It's got no peppers!"*]

SISTER DIONISIA. [*Gently apologetic.*] Now my children . . . what difference does it make?

FELIPE. Well . . . I'm not going to eat it.

[*He gets up in protest and all the others do the same, crying, "Nor am I!" "Nor I!" . . . all but* MORENITO, *who says nothing, but stays in his corner calmly eating away.*]

SISTER DIONISIA. [*Very distressed.*] But, my children, if there's nothing else . . . why, for the love of God . . . eat this!

[FELIPE *stands upon a bench and shouts.*]

FELIPE. We don't want it and we won't eat it! We've had enough of eating bread and water for the love of God!

[*A chorus of shouting approbation.*]

SISTER DIONISIA. But boys . . . boys . . . boys!

FELIPE. Always shaking a crucifix at you . . .

[*More approbation.*]

FELIPE. . . . whenever they want to cheat you out of something!

[*There is enthusiastic agreement with this.*]

SISTER DIONISIA. Oh boys, do be quiet . . . just because I ask you to. You're quite right . . . but do eat your supper. What good will it do you to go to bed hungry? You shall have something better tomorrow. Now be good . . . be patient . . . sit down . . . oh, please do as I tell you!

[*Some of them, thus appealed to, are sitting down when* FELIPE *says*:]

FELIPE. The boy that puts his spoon in his plate is a coward.

SISTER DIONISIA. Now you be quiet!

FELIPE. I won't be quiet. I say that he's a coward and a sneak.

[*Those that are down get up again and thus reinforced they all protest, loudly, that "They won't! No, they won't!"*]

SISTER DIONISIA. Sit down . . . sit down!

FELIPE. And the boy that sits down to table again is a disgrace to us all!

[*A great clamour; cries, stamping and hammering on the tables.*]

SISTER DIONISIA. [*To* FELIPE.] Will you be good enough to leave the room this very minute?

FELIPE. Oh, I'm going! But I'm not going alone. Come along, all of you! Anyone that's not afraid and wants something to eat . . . follow me!

[*They cheer him and cry that they will, and they are moving off.* SISTER DIONISIA *darts to the door and tries to block the way.*]

SISTER DIONISIA. But where are you going . . . what are you going to do?

FELIPE. What men do . . . take by force what we can't get by asking nicely.

[*Loud cheers and great readiness to be gone.*]

SISTER DIONISIA. No . . . no . . . no!

FELIPE. Now you stop interfering or it will be the worse for you. Come on, boys! They keep us penned up here as if we were brute beasts. We may shout as loud as we like and we shan't be heard . . . they've forgotten us. And we're just starved. Well . . . there's bread outside . . . and there's meat outside . . . and there's wine outside . . . so come outside and get it. If it has to be stolen we'll steal it . . . and if killing's what's needed . . . well, we'll do some killing!

[*Tremendous enthusiasm.*]

SISTER DIONISIA. Blessed Jesus . . . Ave Maria . . . help!

FELIPE. [*Beside himself.*] Into the street with you! We'll let them see . . . we'll let them hear. It's an everlasting disgrace the way that we're treated. Well then . . . let's make them treat us better. Throw their bread and water back in their swine's faces! We weren't born different to anyone else, were we? Well then . . . we've a right to be as well fed as everyone else is.

[*They cheer wildly and are marching off.* SISTER DIONISIA *struggles with them in vain, crying, "Get back! Get back!" and then rushes to the bell-rope and pulls it violently. The girls scream.* FELIPE *turns back to them.*]

FELIPE. Well, aren't you coming too? All of us . . . all together . . . where are the rest? Let's have the whole orphanage out in the streets to demand its rights. If we're nobody's children . . . why, we're everybody's children. Come along then . . . March!

[*At this moment* SISTER GRACIA *appears in the doorway.*]

SISTER GRACIA. What's all this?

[*At the sound of her voice and the sight of her, there is something of a lull in the storm, and voices can be heard exclaiming "Reverend Mother! . . . Sister Gracia!"*]

SISTER GRACIA. Oh yes . . . it's Sister Gracia! And what is all this terrible fuss about?

[*The girls have drawn back already and so have some of the boys. The rest stand their ground and the noise has by no means ceased.*]

SISTER DIONISIA. Aie . . . Sister! People must have been giving them wine in the Plaza . . . and there's no holding them.

SISTER GRACIA. So I see. Well . . . we live in a revolutionary age! [*To the girls.*] What . . . you too! [*Then she faces the malcontents.*] Have you had your supper yet?

SISTER DIONISIA. They . . . they didn't like. . . .

SISTER GRACIA. Let me talk to them. Have you had your supper yet?

FELIPE. That's where we're going . . . to get our supper. Well . . . what are you all waiting for? Come on!

SISTER GRACIA. Tsch . . . tsch! [*Looking* FELIPE *squarely in the eyes.*] To get your supper indeed? Where, pray?

FELIPE. Wherever it's to be found.

SISTER GRACIA. And when you've found it . . . do you fancy its owners'll give it you?

FELIPE. If they don't, we'll take it.

[*The few enthusiasts that are left reinforce this with what boldness they can muster.*]

SISTER GRACIA. People keep things that they value locked up, my son.

FELIPE. Then we'll break open the locks.

[*The enthusiasts applaud this also.*]

SISTER GRACIA. [*Quietly now and kindly.*] And do you think if there were any locked door that would open I

shouldn't have been there by this to knock at it for you?

FELIPE. Yes . . . but you go asking so prettily. We're going to try if a few stones won't make them attend.

SISTER GRACIA. My son . . . the answer to a stone is often a bullet.

FELIPE. [*Defiantly.*] So much the better! Far better to be left dead in the street once and for all than to stay here and starve to death bit by bit.

SISTER GRACIA. [*Sternly.*] You don't know what you're talking about. And none of you know what you're doing. Now, there has been enough of this . . . and everybody will be quiet and sit down . . . because I tell them to.

[*They are quiet . . . but they can't make up their minds to obey altogether.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Did you hear what I said? Sit down.

[*The boys go slowly towards the benches.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Come now . . . be quick about it.

[*They slowly sit down.*]

SISTER GRACIA. [*To* FELIPE.] And you.

[*Last of all and much against his will* FELIPE *sits down too.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Now, Sister Dionisia . . . is there any more broth in the kettle?

SISTER DIONISIA. [*Who is still rather frightened.*] Yes, Señora.

SISTER GRACIA. Well then, serve that out . . . then they'll have their supper hot. And let everyone keep quiet. I don't want to have to punish anybody tonight.

[SISTER DIONISIA *and the girls put more broth in the plates. Then after a moment* SISTER GRACIA *goes on talking . . . quietly and kindly now, but masterfully still.*]

SISTER GRACIA. And d'you think you're the only folk in this world who don't get all that they want to eat? No, my children, no. There are people worse off than you . . . some of them so poor that they'd think your plate of supper a luxury. You'll have a roof over your head

tonight and a mattress to sleep on and a blanket to cover you. Think of the people who'll sleep in a ditch by the roadside with no roof but the sky, and only the hoarfrost to come down and cover them. Think of the sick people . . . of people without a friend . . . stumbling through the world with not a hand held out to them . . . nobody caring. While you have a home and all the love we can give you. You are sheltered . . . you are taught . . . you are kept in right paths. And then think if you don't owe a few thanks to God after all.

FELIPE. To God . . . to God! There is no God!

[*A stir of horror among the children.* SISTER DIONISIA *crosses herself and exclaims, "Blessed Jesus!"*]

SISTER GRACIA. And whatever do you think you mean by that, you little fool?

FELIPE. Because if there were . . . would he think this was all right?

SISTER GRACIA. God does not think this is right. Men break his laws. He made them brothers. Is it his fault if they turn wolves and devour each other? God does not think it right that his children should go hungry . . . and the innocent are not ever disgraced in his eyes. It is by no will of his that some are poor and neglected while some are set up in pride. For God is Love and he loves us all and to each one he gives a share in heaven and in this earth.

FELIPE. Don't listen to her . . . she's just preaching lies to you. Nuns have all sold themselves to the rich. Do they ever go hungry? And as long as they can get us to keep up the sham they're let stuff themselves with food in peace.

SISTER GRACIA. I am not lying to you. I am telling you the truth and the whole truth. God does not smile upon the injustice of this world. He endures it . . . for how long? . . . ah, that we do not know. But he does not think it right.

FELIPE. Well then . . . let's go and break the heads

of those that do . . . and God will thank us for that.

[*A few of the boys cheer up at this and approve.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Ah, no, no . . . all that can be done for this wicked world is to help to make it good.

FELIPE. And who's going to?

SISTER GRACIA. You . . . you . . . not by hating but through love. Yes, all of you will help do that. For, when you are men . . . and go away from here, it will be because you have suffered from injustice that you'll know how to make . . . and want to make . . . laws that are just. Oh yes, my sons, yes . . . the world is yours . . . for you have won it by hunger and by suffering and pain. So when you hold it in your hands, make it what it ought to be. God is watching you . . . his hopes are all in you. You suffer now that you may succour his world then. God sees you . . . God hears you. Now say with me. Lord, Lord, we thank thee for this food which is given us in thy name. There is not much of it, it is not very good, and we will not forget the taste of this bitter bread. And by thy precious love we swear that thy children on this earth shall eat of it no more . . . say it with me . . . say it . . .

[*The boys repeat after her solemnly and quietly.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Jesus, Son of God . . . Christ, son of man, by the divine blood that thou didst shed for us we swear to spend our own to the last drop when we are men . . . that children may not be forsaken any more . . . that no more mothers may be wronged and go hungry and be ashamed to carry their children in their arms. My sons . . . my sons, promise me that when you are men you'll try to bring these things to pass . . . that you'll help to build on earth the Kingdom of God.

[*Very quietly, very solemnly, they murmur "Yes."*]

SISTER GRACIA. Thank you, my children . . . thank you. And now . . . supper's over . . . go to bed and sleep in peace.

[*The boys go slowly out. Only* FELIPE *does not*

move. He is sitting on his bench, head buried in his arms, and crying. SISTER GRACIA *goes to him and puts a hand upon his shoulder.*]

SISTER GRACIA. Don't cry . . . for men don't cry, you know. And they don't complain. They suffer . . . but they work and hope.

CURTAIN

THE TWO SHEPHERDS

COMEDY IN TWO ACTS

TEATRO LARA, MADRID

1913

CHARACTERS

Doña Paquita.	Don Antonio.
Lucia.	Don Francisco.
Doña Gertrudis.	Don José María.
The Schoolmistress.	Don Juan de Dios.
The Mayoress.	Juanillo.
Rosita.	Mateo.
Niña.	Demetrio.
A Young Lady.	Niceto.
Another Young Lady.	The Mayor.

The Colonel of the Civil Guard.

The Play Takes Place in a Castilian Village of Today.

ACT I

The Scene is the garden of the priest's house. The house itself is simple, almost humble; and the scene is dominated by the side wall of the church in which there is a small door, used by the priest himself for going to and from his duties. In another wall which divides the garden from the street, there is a gate. There are a few flowers and a fruit tree or two . . . but all as simple as the house itself. At this moment too, the laundry, personal and ecclesiastic, has been hung out to dry, some amices, an alb, a surplice, besides table cloths, dinner napkins and things. And when the play begins, JUANILLO, *a young rapscallion of fifteen, is taking them down under the direction of* DOÑA PAQUITA, *the priest's sister, a woman of sixty-five, and helping her to put them into two open baskets. His attention wanders and he dodges the work.*

DOÑA PAQUITA. Juan, you little nuisance! What are you up to? Come here at once!

JUANILLO. Coming, Señora! I say, aren't we in a temper all of a sudden!

DOÑA PAQUITA. And aren't you a more impertinent little idler than ever? Take down that rochet, it ought to be dry by this.

JUANILLO. [*Picking up the rochet throws it above his head, singing a stave of an evidently ribald song.*]

DOÑA PAQUITA. Silence, you young heathen. And put the rochet in the basket. Sacred things are not for playing about with.

JUANILLO. [*Throwing the rochet into the dark basket.*] There she goes!

DOÑA PAQUITA. Not in that one. That's for the house linen, can't you see?

JUANILLO. Oh my gracious goodness me! What would a rochet say if it found itself alongside a table napkin.

DOÑA PAQUITA. Will you listen to what *I* say, please? Everything in its place and reverence where reverence is due! But what does that mean to you, young limb that you are. If you feared either God or the Devil—God keep us from him [*Crossing herself.*] . . . ! Shoo off that sparrow now, or he'll dirty the altar cloth. [JUANILLO *scampers round after the sparrow with great gusto.*] But don't run, you little fiend. The linen will be a nice sight, won't it? with all the dust that you're raising. Take down the amice now.

JUANILLO. I'll get the chair. [*From the chair he can see* LUCIA *who is going along the street.*] So long, Lucia!

[LUCIA, *a pretty, demure minx of eighteen, pauses at the gate, and looks in. She is carrying a laundress's basket.*]

LUCIA. Good afternoon, Godmother. I'll be with you in a minute. I'm going to the sacristy to get the linen.

DOÑA PAQUITA. God go with you, my dear. Don't be too long about it.

JUANILLO. [*To* LUCIA.] Father Antonio's been asking for you.

LUCIA. [*With alarm.*] For me?

JUANILLO. Yes . . . and you're not to go without seeing him. He wants to talk to you!

LUCIA. To me?

JUANILLO. Get along with you to the church then. It's just where you ought to be, asking God on your knees to forgive you for taking those walks, as you do, all alone in the woods with Mateo. [LUCIA, *without a word, disappears.* JUANILLO *goes on in great delight.*] Aha, look at her, look at her! Did you see how she blushed? So it's true!

DOÑA PAQUITA. Will you be quiet?

JUANILLO. Oh yes, I'll be quiet. But it's true. Besides . . . I've seen them.

DOÑA PAQUITA. All right then . . . all right! Unfasten the altar cloth. Take care it doesn't drag! [JUANILLO, *after unfastening the altar cloth, jumps to the ground.*] Help me stretch it. Take hold of that end. Pull! Carefully!!

JUANILLO. And to look at her you'd say that she didn't know a goose from a gander! But that's women all over. Follow their fancies and when things go wrong, then it's the Saints must get them out of the mess. Not that I wouldn't rather like to be a Saint and have the dear repentant creatures come and tell me all about it.

DOÑA PAQUITA. You imp of Satan . . . can't anything or anyone be free from that wicked tongue of yours.

JUANILLO. Wicked tongue, indeed! I should think it was wickeder to commit the sin than to talk about it.

DOÑA PAQUITA. Should you! Well, the Church tells us to keep silent about the faults of our neighbours. How do we know that the stories are true?

JUANILLO. [*With a very wise and ancient air.*] Now, how have you managed to grow so old and to remain so very stupid!

DOÑA PAQUITA. You are a very rude boy!

JUANILLO. Oh, please don't be angry. Not stupid then . . . but so easily taken in. Why, of course all the stories you hear are true. So are a great many more that you don't!

DOÑA PAQUITA. Juanillo, you horrify me! I can't think how such a piece of wickedness as you got loose in the world.

JUANILLO. Well . . . father and mother managed it somehow.

[*A tumbling of bells is heard; the sound of people, presumably coming out of the church, and the voices of children who are crying: A baptism! A baptism!*]

JUANILLO. [*Throwing away an amice which he has in his hand.*] The christening's over. They're coming out of church. They'll be throwing the pennies.

[*He disappears into the street.*]

DOÑA PAQUITA. Juanillo! Off like a greyhound! My amice on the ground! [*Picks up the amice, and goes to look over the wall.*] Oh, but the godmother's smart, I must say.

[*The noise outside increases. Copper coins are heard falling, footsteps, the shouts and disputes of a crowd of children.*]

A VOICE. Long live the godfather!
VOICES. A christening! Show us the baby!
A VOICE. Throw us the pennies!!
VOICES. A christening . . . a christening!!
1ST VOICE. That's mine!
2ND VOICE. I saw it first!
1ST VOICE. I picked it up!
VOICES. A christening!
3RD VOICE. Chuck us another one!
VOICES. [*Singing.*]

He'll never grow up a Christian boy,
This little baby won't,
Nor his father's pride, nor his mother's joy.
For why? For why?
They christened him *under* the font!

1ST VOICE. That's mine!
JUANILLO. Oh, you want them all, don't you?
1ST VOICE. It *is* mine!
JUANILLO. Not if I know it!

[*A noise of blows and boys' voices.*]

3RD VOICE. Let him have it!
2ND VOICE. Coward!
4TH VOICE. One for his nob!

[*During all these happenings* DOÑA PAQUITA *is looking over the wall, crossing herself and making at the right moment the following comments.*]

DOÑA PAQUITA. Ay Jesus! Now somebody's going to get their head broken. I do wish people wouldn't throw them money. That always raises the devil. Juanillo, *will* you come here when you're told? Yes, when he wants to, he will . . . not before. . . . Holy Virgin! They'll kill each other! Let go, you murderous little ruffian!

3RD VOICE. Look out . . . here's the sexton!

DOÑA PAQUITA. Oh, Benito, do pull them apart!

VOICE OF THE SEXTON. Now then, you young scoundrels . . . off with you!

VOICES. [*Singing.*] Where does the sexton get the wax
For the tapers he sells in bundles?
When he has bolted the door you
can see through the cracks.
What? What?
He's nicking it off the candles.

[*A sound of cries and of children scampering.*]

DOÑA PAQUITA. Be off! Run away home all of you!

[JUANILLO, *much ruffled from his fight, comes back.*]

DOÑA PAQUITA. Good God, he's bleeding!

JUANILLO. [*Cleaning himself off with his sleeve.*] Don't be frightened. It's nothing to hurt.

DOÑA PAQUITA. You'll have no face left soon . . . nothing but scratches and bruises. And a nice way to spend your time, isn't it? Fighting . . . in the street!

JUANILLO. Call this a bruise? If you want to see bruises go and look at him. And he won't forget the kick he got from me either. No, by . . . !

DOÑA PAQUITA. Don't swear! It's a mortal sin to swear.

JUANILLO. And all for a halfpenny! That's a nice sort of godfather for you. And Papa was just as stingy. A shillingsworth of coppers. It's worth more than that

I should think to walk along with your nose in the air behind the baby . . . even if the brat *isn't* your own after all!

DOÑA PAQUITA. What's that you say?

JUANILLO. Take it from me.

DOÑA PAQUITA. If you don't shut your wicked mouth you'll be struck dead by lightning, so you will. And suppose anyone going by had heard you say that . . . in the priest's own house too?

[DON ANTONIO, *the priest, comes out from the church. He is sixty years old, and has a benevolent, but at the same time, energetic air. He has rough white hair. He wears a cassock and carlotte. He is carrying a small, very ancient figure of the Virgin and child.*]

DON ANTONIO. Well, another little lamb in the fold. [*He says this quite simply as if it were a current phrase.*] And what's the matter with you, Paquita? You look very upset!

DOÑA PAQUITA. What's usually the matter? This Judas Iscariot of a boy will be the death of me!

DON ANTONIO. God bless my soul! What has he done now?

DOÑA PAQUITA. Ask him!

JUANILLO. [*Humbly.*] Nothing . . . nothing at all, Father. I was only picking up one of the coins thrown for the christening . . . and some stone or other must have hit me. But women always exaggerate, don't they . . . especially old women!

DOÑA PAQUITA. Old women! Do you hear that?

DON ANTONIO. [*Smiling.*] Ladies . . . and, when absolutely necessary . . . elderly ladies . . . would sound better. And how many thousand times have I told you to speak of my sister respectfully?

DOÑA PAQUITA. Respectfully!

DON ANTONIO. Now go in and wash that place clean and put some court plaster on it.

JUANILLO. No need. It's too hard to crack. [*He hits his head to give evidence of this.*]

DON ANTONIO. I know that. But do as you're told.

[JUANILLO *goes into the house.*]

DOÑA PAQUITA. Delightful! Yet let him off without a word. Of course he's a little angel . . . still it might do him some good to have his wings clipped.

DON ANTONIO. But what's the use of punishing him because he has had his head broken?

DOÑA PAQUITA. Oh, it isn't his broken head. It's his viper's tongue. But you're used to that by now, I suppose.

DON ANTONIO. I've got used to hearing you say so . . . for these five years.

DOÑA PAQUITA. And I'm to keep on saying it for another five, am I?

DON ANTONIO. But what do you want done with the lad? He has neither father nor mother nor anyone else. Wasn't it our duty to take him in, and how could we turn him out now? He's a good boy at bottom.

DOÑA PAQUITA. He's a perfect little earthquake.

DON ANTONIO. Sister, sister, we must learn to be patient. Rome wasn't built in a day . . . and it's more than a mile to heaven.

DOÑA PAQUITA. Well, well . . . I'm not a saint like you!

DON ANTONIO. Has Don Juan de Dios come yet?

DOÑA PAQUITA. No.

DON ANTONIO. That's very odd. His train must have been in this half hour.

DOÑA PAQUITA. He'll come by the last.

DON ANTONIO. I think not. When he started this morning he said he only meant just to call in at the Bishop's palace to find out what was going on, and then that he'd come straight back . . .

DOÑA PAQUITA. As if you didn't know what he is. He'll be stopping at every church he comes to to say the Stations of the Cross.

DON ANTONIO. I daresay he will. He gets to be more and more devout.

DOÑA PAQUITA. And whose was the christening? For the baker's baby? Well, they might at least have asked you to the Breakfast! After all, but for you, the father would be rotting in jail at this very moment.

DON ANTONIO. Woman, woman, they *did* ask me! They did all that they ought to do. But I didn't happen to want to go.

DOÑA PAQUITA. And quite right not to, considering the sort of orgy it's likely to be. I should doubt if even the baby will finish up sober!

DON ANTONIO. Charity, charity, Paquita!

DOÑA PAQUITA. Do you want your chocolate?

DON ANTONIO. Thank you, I don't think I feel like it.

DOÑA PAQUITA. Aren't you well? Have you got a pain?

DON ANTONIO. No.

DOÑA PAQUITA. Worried?

DON ANTONIO. Now, why should I be!

DOÑA PAQUITA. Shall I send to the Convent and ask if Don Juan de Dios has got back?

DON ANTONIO. No, we shall hear soon enough.

DOÑA PAQUITA. Well, I do think the Archbishop might find some other way of amusing himself and leave his parish priests in peace.

DON ANTONIO. And what do you know of such things, pray? Be quiet, Paquita.

DOÑA PAQUITA. One needn't know much to know that there's no sense in making men of your age pass examinations as if they were charity schoolboys.

DON ANTONIO. His Grace knows what he's about. He wants to take stock of his shepherds and find out in what sort of hands his flocks are.

DOÑA PAQUITA. Then let him come here and see for himself! Here, among the flock is where the worth of the shepherd is known. Examinations in Latin and Theology,

indeed! Let him come here, I say, and hear what this village was thirty years ago . . . and then see what it is today. Thanks to you and your toil and the heart's blood you've poured out for the sake of these sticks and stones . . . may God forgive me! And what do you gain by it?

DON ANTONIO. Heaven. Is that so small a thing to gain?

DOÑA PAQUITA. Oh yes, it'll pay you hereafter, no doubt. But what about *now?* Till this very moment has it ever occurred to the Archbishop to give you a thought? And here you've been slaving for thirty years . . . as *locum tenens* too. A *locum tenens* for thirty years! So that they could keep you on half pay!

DON ANTONIO. Quite so! And His Grace when he came to the diocese found so many of us in like case, men who passed years and years working as parish priests and never being regularly made so, and therefore, as you say, on half pay . . . and he wanted to put that all right. After we've been examined we shall all be regular priests . . . on full pay. So cheer up!

DOÑA PAQUITA. A lot it will matter to me! For however much money comes into this house. . . .

DON ANTONIO. I know . . . there's always somebody wanting it, isn't there? So in any case, it won't come amiss.

[DOÑA PAQUITA, *while they are talking, has finished picking up the linen and folding it.*]

DOÑA PAQUITA. And you don't want your chocolate? Then I'll hurry up supper. Are you coming in?

DON ANTONIO. I think I'd sooner sit out in the air.

DOÑA PAQUITA. Shall I take away the Virgin?

DON ANTONIO. No. Tell Juanillo to get out the tool box. I want to repair her crown. There are a few stones out of it.

[DOÑA PAQUITA *goes into the house, carrying one of the two baskets.* DON ANTONIO *sits down by the table upon which he has placed the Virgin; takes off*

her crown, extracts from his pocket a paper in which, carefully wrapped up, there are two or three imitation stones, and spreads it open. NICETO *and* DEMETRIO *appear at the gate.* NICETO *is plainly a very ignorant sort of fellow.* DEMETRIO *is smooth, more effeminate and he makes many gestures. Both are men of the people.*]

DEMETRIO. Glory be to God!

DON ANTONIO. Amen!

NICETO. May we . . . ?

DON ANTONIO. Yes; come in.

NICETO. Good afternoon.

DON ANTONIO. Good afternoon to you.

DEMETRIO. My respects to you, Father.

DON ANTONIO. Well, what's the news?

DEMETRIO. Precious little, Father.

NICETO. And that's bad.

DON ANTONIO. God's will be done, you know. Sit down.

DEMETRIO. Thank you kindly. [*He sits.*]

NICETO. I'm well enough as I am.

DON ANTONIO. Just as you like, my son. Well now, what is it?

DEMETRIO. I suppose, Father, we'd better begin at the beginning . . . because, as the saying is, there must be a beginning to everything. Therefore . . .

NICETO. Don't waste your time listening to him, Father. When he has got all his fine words off his chest it'll only have to be told all over again.

DEMETRIO. Well, tell it your own way then.

NICETO. If I hadn't had patience enough not to use my fists on you, you wouldn't be here to tell it at all . . . and if you weren't such a lath and plaster image of a man that anyone breaking your head for you would only be called a coward . . .

DEMETRIO. Which means that you are too much of a coward to try. . . .

NICETO. Am I! [*Looking at the priest.*] You think you're safe now behind *his* petticoats. . . .

DON ANTONIO. Yes, yes . . . but come to the point. Use fine words or any other sort you can find. [*To* DEMETRIO.] You!

DEMETRIO. Well, it's like this. I was the proprietor . . . with all due respect to you, Father . . . of an ass.

NICETO. Well, I suppose we must call it one.

DEMETRIO. And what do mean by *that?*

NICETO. You can judge what a precious jewel of a beast it was when he sold it to me for three dollars and a half.

DEMETRIO. If you bought it for three dollars and a half, it couldn't have been so bad.

NICETO. I wanted something to work the pump, and I wasn't going to buy a young racehorse, was I? And even at that the poor beast was dear.

DEMETRIO. Dear or not, you took him away. And not a penny of the money have I seen.

NICETO. But didn't we agree that the money shouldn't be paid till I'd sold my pigs?

DEMETRIO. I don't remember that.

NICETO. Well, I do. For if I'd paid you the money down there and then, the half dollar was to have come off . . . making it three dollars cash.

DEMETRIO. Then as you didn't pay, the ass remained mine.

NICETO. Mine . . . because I'd settled to pay you, and I'm ready to stand to my word.

DON ANTONIO. But what in the name of ten thousand devils does all this matter? You've got him . . . and you're to be paid for him.

NICETO. No . . . no one has got him now, Father.

DON ANTONIO. How's that?

NICETO. He's dead.

DEMETRIO. Since yesterday, six o'clock.

DON ANTONIO. Ah . . . and in your possession when he died?

NICETO. Yes, I'd had him three days, Father.

DON ANTONIO. Well . . . pay for him then. And get along with you.

NICETO. That's what I say. Ready money. Here they are. Three dollars and a half.

[*He starts to pay it down on the table.*]

DEMETRIO. Keep your money.

NICETO. You won't have the offer of it again.

DEMETRIO. Three dollars and a half! Yes, a nice little bargain for you, isn't it?

DON ANTONIO. But . . .

NICETO. And I wouldn't pay you that, if he hadn't died as he did.

DEMETRIO. There, that's the sort of man he is, Father!!

DON ANTONIO. Now, do let me understand. What did the ass die of . . . and what has that to do with it?

NICETO. Well, Father, here's just how it was. Yesterday afternoon Paca . . . my wife . . . was bringing him home from where he's been having a bit of a feed. And such a state he was in even then . . . even *then* . . . that he hardly could stagger along. Well, as luck would have it, along comes a motor and frightened the brute, and he got in its way. And it hit him just about here [*Indicating the priest's head.*] saving your presence. And as he wasn't what you might call strong . . . well, he lay where he fell. Then Paca . . . *you* know what women are, Father . . . started to weep and to wail, calling out she was ruined and that the ass was all that she and the children had to live on . . . and "What about the police" and "What had the law to say to it" . . . so the people in the car . . . they must have been weak in the head . . . just to put a stop to her noise, gave her a twenty dollar note and made off as quick as they could.

DON ANTONIO. Well, what more?

NICETO. Nothing more! Only now this fellow says that the twenty dollars are his.

DEMETRIO. Weren't they paid for the ass? And wasn't the ass mine?

NICETO. But hadn't I bought him from you?

DEMETRIO. But you hadn't paid *me*.

NICETO. Haven't I been trying to pay you these last two hours?

DEMETRIO. Thank you, but I've changed my mind. I don't care about selling him now.

NICETO. No, a bargain's a bargain.

DEMETRIO. Have you got it in writing?

NICETO. Writing! I'll write it out on your skin with my stick and seal it on your skull with my fist, so I will!

[*And a fight begins.*]

DON ANTONIO. Stop that now! Keep your hands off each other and be quiet.

[*They separate.*]

DON ANTONIO. Now what did you both come to me for?

NICETO. Well, we always do come to you, don't we, Father . . . to have you say which is in the right? And that's me! For this fellow didn't want to come . . . and he can't deny that.

DEMETRIO. I didn't want to trouble his reverence about such a thing.

NICETO. And why on earth shouldn't he be troubled? What else did he learn to be a priest for!

DON ANTONIO. Very well then. The ass was yours by legal right.

DEMETRIO. But Father, Father, consider a moment . . .

DON ANTONIO. I am considering . . . so be silent. Therefore the twenty dollars . . . though they were fraudulently obtained . . . are yours too.

NICETO. [*Turning away.*] Thank you . . . good afternoon.

DON ANTONIO. Wait. There's no doubt they are yours. But we will consider also that this man who was your friend trusted to your honour and handed you over the ass without getting his money for it. And ran the risk . . . you've told us so yourself . . . of never getting it at all if the beast had died on your hands. Therefore as the twenty dollars fell to you by chance, and you did not a thing for them, share them with him. Instead of the three and a half you owe him, pay him seven dollars . . . and let me hear no more about it.

NICETO. Seven dollars indeed . . . as if I was made of them!

DEMETRIO. What . . . and he gets thirteen!

DON ANTONIO. Yes, and you're three and a half to the good. And if you don't like my decision, go to law about it.

NICETO. No doubt . . . and be done out of the whole twenty dollars for costs. You're law enough for this village, Father.

DON ANTONIO. Very well then . . . fork out.

NICETO. But. . . .

DON ANTONIO. What *now?*

NICETO. What's my wife going to say when I tell her I've parted with seven dollars?

DON ANTONIO. A lot you care what she says!

NICETO. Oh Father, you don't know what women are. . . . How should you?

DON ANTONIO. Are you master in your house or is she?

NICETO. I am! But it takes a lot of argument to convince my wife.

DON ANTONIO. Yes . . . and I've noticed that the stick's what you like to argue with . . . if she so much as opens her mouth to you.

NICETO. Well, Father, it's odd . . . but the more you beat 'em the more they seem to get their own way.

[DON FRANCISCO, *the village doctor, a man about* DON ANTONIO'S *age, is seen in the gateway.*]

DON ANTONIO. Who goes there?

DON FRANCISCO. Friend!

DON ANTONIO. Ah, doctor . . . come in. How are you?

DON FRANCISCO. What are you up to?

DON ANTONIO. Settling a quarrel, as usual.

DON FRANCISCO. Gratis?

DON ANTONIO. Of course. That's their only reason for preferring my judgment to the magistrate's. [NICETO *and* DEMETRIO *laugh.*] Isn't that so, you scoundrels?

NICETO. Yes, Father. . . .

DON ANTONIO. Then . . . be off with you!

DEMETRIO. Good afternoon.

NICETO. Afternoon!

DON ANTONIO. Can't you even take the trouble to say thank you?

DEMETRIO. Oh . . . beg pardon, Father, I'm sure.

NICETO. But you know that we mean it, don't you!

[DEMETRIO *and* NICETO *go out.* JUANILLO *comes in and sets a box on the table in which various tools, a hammer, pliers, etc. are neatly set out.*]

JUANILLO. Here is the tool chest. Anything else you want?

DON ANTONIO. Show the doctor your hurt.

JUANILLO. But it's nothing . . . I've cured it.

DON FRANCISCO. [*Going up to* JUANILLO *and taking off the handkerchief which he is wearing on his head like a turban.*] Let's have a look. What did you put on it?

JUANILLO. A slice of onion, salt and vinegar. What else should I put on it?

DON FRANCISCO. Kill or cure!

JUANILLO. Was that wrong?

DON FRANCISCO. Put your head in that water-butt. Wash the place well. [JUANILLO *obeys.*] Now come here. Dry yourself. [*He puts on a piece of court-plaster.*] There . . . that'll last till your next fight. Weeds are mighty hard to kill.

DOÑA PAQUITA. [*In the house.*] Juanillo, bring in the black basket.

JUANILLO. Coming, Señora.

[JUANILLO *takes up the black basket, and goes into the house, taking his time.*]

DON FRANCISCO. Where's your water jar?

[*He goes to fetch the round earthen jar with its spout and handle, which is under one of the stone seats beneath the arbour, and takes a long drink.*]

DON ANTONIO. It's warm today, isn't it?

DON FRANCISCO. The country's so hot it might be on fire. And I've had to walk all the way from the Venta Vieja. [*Again drinks copiously.*] Ah, nothing like a good drink of cold water when you're thirsty. [*He puts the water jar on the stone seat and goes up to the table.*] Nature has been very wise in giving us the greatest pleasures in life for nothing. We poor people should give thanks for that.

DON ANTONIO. [*Smiling.*] To Nature . . . or to God, Señor don Francisco?

DON FRANCISCO. To whichever you please, Señor Don Antonio. You and I are not going to quarrel over a word. Any news yet about that affair of yours?

DON ANTONIO. Nothing more so far. But I'm expecting Don Juan de Dios any minute. He went off to the Archbishop's this morning to find out what he could. Who's ill at the Venta Vieja?

DON FRANCISCO. The old grandfather. You'd better look in.

DON ANTONIO. Is he very poorly?

DON FRANCISCO. Blood poisoning. Anyone else would die of it. But he mayn't.

DON ANTONIO. What have you given him?

DON FRANCISCO. Oh, the usual thing. A bath. And plenty of water to drink with lemon juice squeezed in it.

DON ANTONIO. Well, that won't do any harm.

DON FRANCISCO. Or any good either, d'you think?

Don't be too sure. Water's not touched him inside or out since the day he was christened. He has worked in the fields all his life. He's burnt up with wine and sun. Water . . . just for a change . . . may work a miracle.

DON ANTONIO. Perhaps you're right.

DON FRANCISCO. I've seen it happen. People talk of these "cures" . . . Anything may be a cure . . . for something. Yesterday they installed a regular medicine man in the dispensary. He has just got through his examinations in Madrid with flying colours . . . and he seems a clever boy. A little pedantic . . . but that's only natural . . . for he knows such a lot . . . such a devil of a lot. To hear him talk about serums and injections and immunity and all the while giving me a look from the corner of his eye as much as to say, "Now's your chance to pick up a tip or two." And I sat and laughed to myself. "Talk away, my lad," I thought. "These clodhoppers here are made of another clay than the sort your Madrid professors like to meddle with. Once upon a time I had book learning at my fingers' ends too. Wait a little, and you'll be glad enough to put your faith in lemon juice and water." Why, *you* might as well ask them when they come to confession, whether they'd been committing the unforgivable sin against the Holy Ghost. No, no . . . What good would the silk purse be to the sow anyway . . . she's better off with her ear. Leave learning to the learned!

DON ANTONIO. And theology to the Bishops. To get these folk to heaven I've to drag them by the scruffs of their necks . . . I know that!

DON FRANCISCO. Well, I have to vaccinate 'em by main force to keep them on earth a little longer. I went into the school yesterday afternoon, shut the door, and left El Tuerto in front of it with a thick stick. "Now," I said, "not a child leaves this room till he's been vaccinated." Lord, you should have heard them yell. Well . . . I'd had three of them die on my hands in two days and there's no mortal way of knocking sense into their

mothers. The savages! When they're ill they still think they're possessed by the devil. I am . . . when I have to write small-pox on a death certificate. And now if one of these children that I stick a little calf lymph into goes and dies after all, the village will want to lynch me. So I ask myself . . . and you . . . for we're both in the same boat . . . since we get neither pay nor thanks . . . why on earth do we make such fools of ourselves?

DON ANTONIO. For the love of God, my dear doctor.

DON FRANCISCO. Or is it that we just can't leave ill alone.

DON ANTONIO. Well, do you wonder? When most human beings . . . God forgive me for saying so . . . are hardly better than brute beasts, what should we do, if by God's grace we're a little less so, but lend them our strength and our brains. For it's not their fault, poor things.

DON FRANCISCO. Don Antonio, Don Antonio . . . be careful. That sounds very like an attack upon Providence.

DON ANTONIO. Not at all! God made us all, and as he made us it is good to be. He has his reasons for all that he does.

DON FRANCISCO. He may have . . . but I wish he'd confide 'em to us sometimes.

[LUCIA *comes in from the street, and crosses the garden rapidly, making signs to someone outside, who can not be seen, to wait for her. She is carrying a flat wicker basket, covered with a white cloth.*]

DON FRANCISCO. Hullo, Lucia!

LUCIA. Good afternoon, Don Antonio . . . good afternoon, Don Francisco. [*She wishes to go on her way without being stopped.*] Is my godmother in?

DON FRANCISCO. You're in a great hurry.

LUCIA. I've brought the surplices.

DON ANTONIO. Come here . . . I want to talk to you.

LUCIA. [*Nervously.*] Yes, Father.

DON ANTONIO. Put that down. [*The basket.*] Who are you making signs to?

LUCIA. No one . . . no, indeed, Father. [DON ANTONIO *looks fixedly at her.*] . . . that's to say, only to Mateo, who's waiting outside for me. But don't think. . . .

DON FRANCISCO. Mateo? Oho . . . so you mean to be my lady Mayoress, do you?

LUCIA. I?

DON FRANCISCO. Well, he'll be Mayor, I daresay, when his father dies. . . . So . . . it stands to reason . . . sauce for the gander is sauce for the goose, isn't it?

LUCIA. What an idea!

DON FRANCISCO. Oh . . . then you don't mean to marry him. It's a pity in that case you go so many walks with him in the woods of an evening.

LUCIA. I?

DON FRANCISCO. Yes, Miss . . . you. And he! Now don't deny it, because you've been seen.

LUCIA. Who by?

DON FRANCISCO. By me. So now!

DON ANTONIO. Listen to me, Lucia. I have heard of these walks too.

LUCIA. Oh yes . . . from that little tell-tale Juanillo.

DON ANTONIO. Never mind how . . . for sooner or later, one way or another, it was bound to be known.

LUCIA. Yes, I suppose so . . .

DON ANTONIO. Even then it's not people knowing it that matters . . . but that there should be anything to know. Do you understand me?

LUCIA. Yes, Father.

DON FRANCISCO. Well, that's something.

DON ANTONIO. And what do you think will be the end of this love-making in secret . . . ?

DON FRANCISCO. . . . More or less . . . rather less by this time.

LUCIA. Well . . . you see . . .

DON ANTONIO. You are as poor as a church mouse. He is well off. You're an orphan. His father's the Mayor of the village. Is he going to marry you for the sake of your pretty face?

[LUCIA *doesn't answer.*]

DON ANTONIO. Well?

LUCIA. I love him.

DON ANTONIO. And does he love you, pray?

LUCIA. He says so . . .

DON ANTONIO. You don't seem very sure of it.

LUCIA. Well, you know what men are, Father!

DON ANTONIO. I suppose what you mean is that you think you do. Then what on earth are you about, throwing your reputation away in this insane fashion?

LUCIA. I suppose I've a right to live my own life in my own way, haven't I?

DON ANTONIO. And what in Heaven's name do you mean by *that?*

LUCIA. Oh, of course I'm nobody. I'm a country girl. I'm poor and I haven't been educated. But he's no better born than I am, and it isn't much good that his going to school has done him. Of course he has got money, or rather his father has. But is that any reason his mother should treat me like the dirt under her feet?

DON ANTONIO. Now what has his mother to do with it?

LUCIA. Didn't she come on the feast of the Virgin a year ago last August when I was dancing with Mateo in the Square . . . and that was no crime, was it? . . . and say before everybody that her son was too good for me . . . too good to be dancing with me, if you please? Well, I know that I'm poor, but why should that stop me from doing what I want to do? So I swore that I'd get the better of her for that . . . and I have.

DON ANTONIO. Can't you see that it's you will get the worst of it all?

LUCIA. Yes, I suppose so. But I have made her angry.

DON FRANCISCO. Which is always a comfort.

DON ANTONIO. Come here, you poor little fool. Here's a good lady that has done you no harm, and just to annoy her you think it worth while to disgrace yourself. Don't you know that your only dowry is your virtue and your good name, the fact that no one can say a syllable against you? And can't you understand, you feather-brain, that if when you're a good girl the Mayoress doesn't think you good enough for her son, you'll be good enough for nobody if you're a bad one? Where will you be I should like to know when everybody refuses to have anything to do with you? And if you could keep your shame a secret from them, can you keep it secret from God? You are a Christian, you have been dedicated to the Virgin Mother. You are committing deadly sin. Our Lady is watching you from Heaven with very sorrowful eyes. [LUCIA *hangs her head.*] Well, what is it now?

LUCIA. I did tell Mateo that you'd think it very wrong if you knew.

DON ANTONIO. And what did he say to that?

LUCIA. [*With much candour.*] He said it was none of your business.

[*The Doctor laughs.*]

DON ANTONIO. [*With almost comical indignation.*] None of my business! Whose business is it then I should like to know? You've no father, your mother's a helpless cripple. You're my sister's godchild. And even though you were not, I have known you since you were born . . . I baptised you . . . I've taught you the little catechism you know . . . your silly head wouldn't hold more . . . I gave you your first absolution . . . ah, and that's true, since Easter . . . four months ago, you haven't been to confession.

LUCIA. No . . . Mateo says he doesn't like me to go to confession.

DON ANTONIO. And why not, pray?

LUCIA. Well, he says that after all priests are only men

just like he is . . . and they might easily take advantage of an innocent girl like me.

DON ANTONIO. Wrath of God!

DON FRANCISCO. Ho . . . ho! . . . he prefers to confess you himself, does he, under the pine trees.

DON ANTONIO. [*To the shabby old figure of the Virgin.*] Mother of God . . . do you hear this? Give me patience. Don't let me be driven to violence. [*To* LUCIA.] Take yourself out of my sight! No, come here. Now understand me once and for all. This scandalous nonsense is over, over and done with. For the future . . . from tonight . . . you will live here with your godmother, and she will see that you are kept properly employed. Your mother will go to the Hospital, where the Sisters will look after her far better than ever her gadabout daughter has done. As for Mateo, he can amuse himself by taking care of the kitten, for not so much as the tip of your skirt shall he ever touch again, I'll see to that.

LUCIA. [*Almost crying.*] Oh no, Father . . .

DON ANTONIO. Now, what is it . . . what's the matter?

LUCIA. I can't.

DON ANTONIO. What do you mean?

LUCIA. I simply can't.

DON ANTONIO. Why can't you?

LUCIA. [*Sobbing.*] Because I don't want to . . . and because I simply can't . . . now that there . . . isn't any help for it.

DON ANTONIO. What?

DON FRANCISCO. What's that?

LUCIA. [*Without stopping her crying.*] Well, you see . . . now . . . now . . .

DON FRANCISCO. Young woman . . . look me straight in the face. [*Then he smiles.*] Oh, so that's it, is it? We've been sitting down to dinner before the bell rang!

[*She cries like a child without answering.*]

DON ANTONIO. You? You! Answer me . . . is this true? You, Lucia!

LUCIA. [*Choking.*] Yes . . . yes, Father. But you see I . . . that is, he said . . .

DON ANTONIO. Child of sin. Oh, but you're all alike. And wanting to keep your good name into the bargain. He said . . . ! Wait and see what'll be said to you now! Lord God . . . what is to be done with this village full of swine!

LUCIA. [*Weeping, but rather for the sake of the conventions, because, at bottom, she is glad to have got out of her difficulty.*] Ay . . . Ay . . . Ay!

DON ANTONIO. Don't cry! And with that angel face! Too innocent if you please, to come to confession . . . and now we hear this! Well, and what are you going to do? Aren't you overwhelmed with shame? Where are you going? Who's to take care of you now . . . ?

LUCIA. [*Knowing that she is sure of being looked after, but believing it an obligation upon her to show intense distress.*] Ay . . . Ay! Whatever will become of me!

DON ANTONIO. Until . . . until . . .

LUCIA. Ay . . . ay . . . ay!

DON FRANCISCO. Come now, come . . . you mustn't go on like this. I'll let you know when it's time to start crying.

LUCIA. Yes, Señor!

DON ANTONIO. [*Gruffly.*] Go into the house . . . and stop making an exhibition of yourself . . . here in the street almost. Paquita!

LUCIA. Ay . . . don't tell my godmother.

DON ANTONIO. She'll know soon enough, won't she, whether we tell her or not? Paquita!

DOÑA PAQUITA. [*Appearing.*] What is it?

DON ANTONIO. The Doctor has a case for you.

DON FRANCISCO. [*Supporting* LUCIA.] Come along now, child . . . come along.

DOÑA PAQUITA. What's the matter . . . what has happened?

DON FRANCISCO. Nothing more than usual, Señora. The flesh is weak, you know.

[*The three go in.*]

DON ANTONIO. Holy Mother . . . Holy Mother! [*He addresses the Virgin, then turns and calls.*] Mateo! *As there is no answer, he goes out into the street and calls again.*] Mateo! Come in. I want to speak to you.

MATEO. After you, Father.

DON ANTONIO. Go in.

MATEO. If you say so. May I ask what it is you want?

DON ANTONIO. Yes. I want you to go tomorrow morning and take out a license and bring it to me, so that I may send it to the Vicar of the Province. Because on Sunday the first banns must be published. You will be dispensed from the rest . . . and the week after you will be married.

MATEO. I?

DON ANTONIO. Yes, you.

MATEO. Who to?

DON ANTONIO. Who to! God bless my soul . . . to the mother of your child.

MATEO. So that cat's out of the bag, is it? I might have expected it. I believe if Lucia held her tongue for ten minutes she'd burst.

DON ANTONIO. But as if it could be kept a secret . . .

MATEO. Well, that remained to be seen, didn't it?

DON ANTONIO. [*Indignantly.*] What's that you say?

MATEO. [*Shamefacedly.*] Nothing, Father.

DON ANTONIO. So much the better for you. But you know what you've to do now anyhow.

MATEO. Look here, Father. I quite hate to disappoint you . . . but I'm really afraid that I can't.

DON ANTONIO. Can't you indeed! And why "can't" you, I should like to know?

MATEO. Well . . . a man can't . . . so to speak . . . go against his own nature, can he?

DON ANTONIO. I see. And it's yours to behave like a scoundrel, is it?

MATEO. You needn't insult me.

DON ANTONIO. Well, please tell me what *you'd* call a man who just seduces an innocent girl, and then refuses to do his plain duty by her?

MATEO. Oh . . . innocent, Father. Come now . . .

DON ANTONIO. Yes . . . innocent beside you . . . and all such young blackguards. Shame on you, and doubly shame to speak like that of a woman that you yourself have disgraced. Yes, innocent till you came along . . . and an honest girl, till you dishonoured her. And if this is what men are like, why ever do women drag their skirts in the mud for them? That's what I ask! Your mother must be proud of you . . . very proud of the gentleman she has for a son!

MATEO. Look here . . . you know you can tell me I'm not a gentleman, and I've got to put up with it, because you're . . . what you are. But I wouldn't from anyone else. I mayn't be anything very out of the way, but my honour's all right.

DON ANTONIO. Indeed! And will it be when your child has been born fatherless, and his mother is drudging to keep him, or begging bread for them both in the streets . . . or worse?

MATEO. She shan't. They shall both be looked after as long as I live.

DON ANTONIO. As long, I daresay, as you're your own master. But wait six months . . . wait till you marry some woman of your own class, who can bring you the one thing on earth that you want no more of . . . the one thing this other poor girl hasn't got . . . money . . . money! Then you'll have other children, and a very good father you'll be, I don't doubt. Nothing that you and their mother can think of will you deny them. But this

one, your first and more yours than the others can ever be, for he is to be the child of your youth and your illusions, he will go barefoot and hungry, with a bricklayer's hod on his shoulder . . . he'll go to prison, maybe, someday, for stealing his bread from his brothers . . . his own brothers.

MATEO. Father . . .

DON ANTONIO. Oh . . . no doubt you can answer . . . It's none of my business . . . she should have thought of all this sooner . . . and how am I worse than other men? . . . can I go against my nature . . . ?

MATEO. Father, it's not fair, to speak of me as if I were a . . . as if I weren't a . . .

DON ANTONIO. As if you were a scoundrel? You are! As if you weren't a gentleman? You are not!

MATEO. I am. . . . I tell you I am. And I love her. . . . I tell you I love her. I swear it before those two [*The Virgin and Child.*] And I can never love any woman else . . . that's true too. And the day that she told me . . . you know . . . about the baby . . . before ever it struck me what a mess I was in . . . I felt pleased . . . I did indeed . . . and almost proud . . . as if till that moment I'd never really known what . . . well, how would you put it now . . . what life was.

DON ANTONIO. [*Gently.*] And after that you still mean to leave her to her fate?

MATEO. But I don't! It can all go on just as before. I love her . . . I've said so.

DON ANTONIO. Not a bit of it, my son. You'll do what's right by her now, or you won't set eyes on her again. She may have made one mistake, but she's not a bad woman, I know . . . and you shan't see her again.

MATEO. Of course I'd marry her like a shot . . . but my father . . .

DON ANTONIO. Well?

MATEO. He's dead against it. And as for Mother . . . she says if I marry Lucia she'll die of it. And it's just the sort of thing she would do.

DON ANTONIO. All right! If she does, I'll give her Christian burial. But there's not much fear of that.

MATEO. You don't know her!

DON ANTONIO. I think I know you all . . . to my sorrow . . . and an evil worthless lot you are. Now, no more shuffling, my lad. You're going to get married. That's your duty, and it'll be the best thing for you too. The mother of your child is your wife by rights . . . there's no getting away from that. As to your mother . . . you leave her to me. And you can tell your father this to go on with . . . tell him I told you to . . . I know all about that business of the municipal slaughter houses . . . and there's more than one road by which a man may find himself in prison. He'll understand. So be off and break it to your parents . . . and I'll be by presently and assure them the news is true. Tomorrow before noon remember, I shall expect the license.

MATEO. All right.

[*He goes.*]

DON ANTONIO. [*To the Virgin.*] Holy Mother, that's what these people are like. But you know it, you know it well. Stupid, cunning, greedy of money, their hearts as hard as their heads are empty. What can we do to save them? Holy Mother, whatever can we do? But remember, won't you, that sometimes in the end they do the right thing . . . why, now and then, even, you might almost think that one of them was a man. It costs us sweat and blood, Mother, doesn't it, to lead them to the right path? But we must just be patient and keep on. Can your blessed Son ask more of us? Ah no; he knows, none better, the sort of flock that he has given to our care.

[JUANILLO *has entered.*]

JUANILLO. It always sounds as if you were singing little songs to the Virgin.

DON ANTONIO. Now what do *you* want?

JUANILLO. I was listening to you . . . [*Looking at the*

Virgin.] Do you like talking to her . . . when she never answers back?

DON ANTONIO. And how do you know she never answers back?

JUANILLO. [*With terror.*] Does she?

DON ANTONIO. She'll answer you someday . . . somewhere. . . .

JUANILLO. [*Incredulously.*] How does she do it? Does she give you a sign?

DON ANTONIO. What should Our Lady want, my child, with signs or words? She speaks to the soul, and in our souls we hear her voice.

JUANILLO. The soul . . . ?

DON ANTONIO. You'll know what that means someday. There's nothing kept from her and nothing that she doesn't understand. She never listens to idle gossip, and she never judges by appearances, and so her judgment is always right. And there's always good counsel on her lips for him who asks it from his heart . . . and healing in her heart if we bring our troubles to her. . . . She gives us her hand and asks her son to pity us . . . for we want so to serve him and yet we stumble . . . then she prevents our fall. Our Lady is our queen, you see. Well, we all want to be worthy to work for her in her kingdom.

JUANILLO. But what a silly face the child has, hasn't he?

[DON JUAN DE DIOS *appears at the gate.*]

DON JUAN. Ave Maria Purissima. . . .

JUANILLO. Oh . . . it's Don Juan de Dios.

DON ANTONIO. . . . *Concepta sine.* Come in.

DON JUAN. May God make the rest of the day a blessing to us.

DON ANTONIO. What about your journey?

[DON JUAN DE DIOS *has a very troubled air. He is very nervous and keeps on turning his hat in his hands while repeating almost all his words.*]

DON JUAN. Good . . . oh good! That is, the journey

itself was good. A little warm, . . . one can't deny that. But good . . . oh good . . . thanks be to God . . . so to speak.

DON ANTONIO. And did you find out anything?

DON JUAN. Yes . . . oh yes, my friend. I did. Well . . . God's will is . . . is not always, quite naturally . . . does not always accord with the expectations of men . . . desires which seem, so to speak, quite natural, that is, and legitimate. So that . . . well now I'm afraid . . . so to speak . . . that there's nothing more to do . . . but to bow . . . bow, you know . . . to the decrees of Providence.

DON ANTONIO. You mean that . . .

DON JUAN. Frankly . . . yes . . . frankly I do. And of course . . . submission . . . that's what it must come to in the end, mustn't it . . . so what's the use now . . . of saying . . . so to speak . . . anything? And I myself . . . well, I too . . . naturally . . .

DON ANTONIO. But you . . .

DON JUAN. Oh yes . . . both of us, I assure you . . . that's some comfort, isn't it . . . both of us, dear friend . . . both of us are suspended from office.

DON ANTONIO. You say they have suspended me from office!

DON JUAN. And me . . . and me! Oh yes, both of us . . . that's the truth.

DON ANTONIO. Are you quite sure?

DON JUAN. Oh, the secretary himself so to speak . . . his grace the Archbishop's secretary told me . . . that is, naturally in confidence, of course . . . but he told me. And the official communication . . . so to speak . . . will be sent next week.

DON ANTONIO. But what *for?*

DON JUAN. In my case . . . Latin, I'm afraid. . . . Yes, it was, so to speak, Latin. My translation . . . of St. Augustine. You, I fear, failed . . . that is . . . well, yes . . . failed in Theology.

DON ANTONIO. In Theology!

DON JUAN. Dogmatic . . . yes, dogmatic Theology. The secretary . . . well the secretary said that your answer to the question, "De vitiis religionis appositus per defectum . . ." was really . . . yes, "per defectum," was really almost a heresy.

DON ANTONIO. A heresy!

DON JUAN. Well, frankly . . . yes . . . he said . . . that from lack of true doctrine . . . of true doctrine . . . these villages were forgetting . . . so he said . . . the very alphabet of religion. Yes, that's how he put it.

DON ANTONIO. The very alphabet . . .

DON JUAN. For myself . . . I don't resent it . . . so to speak . . . no, I don't resent it. God's punishment on me, no doubt . . . for pride . . . yes, for pride. A mere humble chaplain such as I, who thought . . . yes . . . that he could save souls. *Peccavi . . . peccavi!* My nuns though, my nuns of St. Clara . . . they'll resent it. Because they thought that they had as their chaplain a Chrysostom . . . so to speak . . . oh yes indeed a perfect Chrysostom . . . as it were.

DON ANTONIO. [*First rebellious, then depressed.*] Suspended! Suspended! [*Then with serene resignation.*] God's will be done.

DON JUAN. Why, of course, yes . . . God's will be done.

[DON FRANCISCO *and* DOÑA PAQUITA *come out of the house.*]

DON FRANCISCO. Mostly nerves now! In ten minutes give her another glass of linden-flower water, and let her go home.

DOÑA PAQUITA. Good heavens . . . what a nuisance these girls are!

[JUANILLO *has been in a corner listening to the conversation of the two priests, goes up to* DOÑA PAQUITA *before she has finished coming down the door steps,*

and, taking hold of her skirts, says in almost tragic affliction.]

JUANILLO. Doña Paquita . . . they've suspended him!

DOÑA PAQUITA. What! What's that you say?

JUANILLO. They have! They've suspended him from office for failing in the examination. Yes, Señora . . . Don Antonio . . . and Don Juan de Dios . . . they've suspended them both.

DOÑA PAQUITA. It's not true! Oh, don't talk such nonsense. [*To her brother.*] It's not true, is it?

DON ANTONIO. Yes, it's true, Paquita. And there's nothing to be done. We must just be patient.

DOÑA PAQUITA. D'you mean to tell me that you're no longer priest of this village?

DON ANTONIO. No . . . I've no right here at all.

DOÑA PAQUITA. And who will have . . . may I ask?

DON ANTONIO. Probably some young priest will be sent . . . who can pass the examination.

DOÑA PAQUITA. And you'll be put out in the street?

DON JUAN. Oh no . . . no, indeed . . . I'm sure that the Archbishop . . . that His Grace the Archbishop must take into account the years . . . so to speak . . . years of service. And he'll give him a chaplaincy . . . in an asylum, no doubt . . . or to a Convent . . .

DOÑA PAQUITA. Chaplain to a lot of nuns!

DON JUAN. Well now, I assure you it's not so bad. I have always found my sisters . . . very good, oh yes, indeed. A little tedious at times, perhaps . . . well, yes, I must confess . . . tedious . . . but very good.

DOÑA PAQUITA. Oh, please be quiet

DON FRANCISCO. [*To* DON ANTONIO.] How has it happened?

DON ANTONIO. Well, I'm afraid there's no doubt, that when it comes to dogmatic Theology . . . one has dropped a little behind. As we were saying just now, you know

. . . with one's struggle, year in and year out, with these savages for their salvation, one forgets all about the sort of things that they put in examinations . . .

JUANILLO. [*With indignation.*] Well, of course you do. . . . And here's the Virgin that knows everything . . . why, they'd stump her with their damned questions . . .

CURTAIN

ACT II

The same scene as in the first act. DOÑA PAQUITA, *the* DOCTOR *and* JUANILLO *are in the garden.* DOÑA PAQUITA *is seated, with an air of profound sadness, on one of the stone seats by the door:* JUANILLO *is doubled up on the step of the little door leading into the church, which is half open. The* DOCTOR *is walking up and down the garden with his hands behind his back.*

A ringing of bells is heard as the curtain rises.

DON FRANCISCO. [*Looking into the air, as if he were speaking to the sound of the bells.*] This is a great day.

DOÑA PAQUITA. [*Almost in tears.*] Oh . . . a great day indeed!

[*There is a pause, the sound of an organ inside the church can be faintly heard.*]

DOÑA PAQUITA. [*Sighing.*] There . . . they've reached the Te Deum now.

JUANILLO. Yes . . . and hark at the organist flourishing away! . . . just to show off before the new priest!

DON FRANCISCO. Here . . . why aren't you in your surplice?

JUANILLO. Why should I be?

DON FRANCISCO. Aren't you an acolyte?

JUANILLO. Are we any of us anything now?

DON FRANCISCO. No indeed . . . no indeed, we're not!

JUANILLO. They've turned you out too . . . haven't they?

DON FRANCISCO. Yes, my lad, yes . . . they've turned me out too.

DOÑA PAQUITA. [*Rebellious and bitter.*] God will judge them for it.

DON FRANCISCO. Well, he may! . . . but what can

we all expect in this progressive world? Is this enlightened village of ours the only one to be left behind in the great race of the millennium? We must follow the fashions, we must be brought up to date whether we like it or not! And what are our Town Councillors for but to push us along the path? So when it came to those seven illustrious gentlemen who read the papers once a week and are deep in the secrets of the Government, having to choose between an old doctor who had brought most of them into the world, by the grace of God and the exercise of his common sense and a brand new medical gentleman who was ready to help them die in the very latest and most scientific style, hall marked by Paris and Berlin—well, once again, what could you expect? Señora Doña Paquita. . . . We must be cosmopolitan, up to date. Hurrah for Progress! And if you don't like it get out of the way . . . or be run over, if you like that better!

DOÑA PAQUITA. Well, then . . . God's will be done.

DON FRANCISCO. And the vote was unanimous . . . why the question, so they tell me, wasn't even argued. As with one voice they called aloud for the very latest thing! The first time, I believe, that they have ever agreed upon anything. Blessed progress . . . all-conquering youth!

[*There is another pause.*]

JUANILLO. Andreson's wife, at the inn . . .

DON FRANCISCO. Well?

JUANILLO. She's having her baby today.

DON FRANCISCO. How do you know, pray!

JUANILLO. I saw that new doctor go by. They've called him in because he's a specialist . . . that's what he is . . . an acc—acc—something or other. Anyhow he went by on his motor bicycle like greased lightning.

DON FRANCISCO. Yes, he'd better not waste time. She doesn't.

DOÑA PAQUITA. Well, she's used to it . . . it's her seventh.

DON FRANCISCO. Eighth . . . the fourth time it was

twins. Think of it! That's the first baby for twenty-five years to come into this world and this village without asking my leave!

[*He tries to speak jestingly, but doesn't make a success of it.*]

JUANILLO. And they say that that boy of Juana la Fea's was just dying . . . but the new doctor put water into him with a syringe and he got well at once.

DOÑA PAQUITA. [*Thinking* DON FRANCISCO'S *feelings will be hurt.*] Hold your tongue now!

DON FRANCISCO. Are you going away this very day?

DOÑA PAQUITA. This very evening . . . as soon as they've finished in there [*Indicating the church with a glance, but without moving.*] The van with the furniture has gone on already.

DON FRANCISCO. [*To* JUANILLO.] How much longer will they be?

JUANILLO. There's the sermon to come still . . . he's just going up for it now.

DOÑA PAQUITA. Aren't you going in to hear it ?

DON FRANCISCO. No, thank you!

JUANILLO. They say he's no end of a preacher. Well, since he's preached himself in here and preached us all out into the street I suppose it's true. He gets ten dollars a sermon. And the other day in the Cathedral at the Novenary of Souls he preached and he preached until the Canons almost died of it [*He is at the Church door.*] And what a voice he has! You can hear it through the door. [*Repeating with gestures of admiration what it may be supposed he hears said by the preacher.*] "Honoured servants of the Sanctuary . . . worthy authorities of this godly village . . . best beloved brothers, all, of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Sweetness of Mary." What rot!

[*He hides himself behind the door so that he can go on listening.*]

DOÑA PAQUITA. Shut that door . . . they don't want to hear every noise from the street in there.

DON FRANCISCO. It's a large congregation.

DOÑA PAQUITA. Every soul in the village. That's what novelty will do. Some of those people haven't set foot in the church for a matter of fifty years or so. The Mayor's there and the Schoolmaster and the Colonel of the Militia . . . even the district Judge . . . though he stands, if you please, for Sunday work at the Universities. . . . [*Crossing herself.*] God save us from that at least!

DON FRANCISCO. But it seems that he is a bit of a prodigy.

DOÑA PAQUITA. Who . . . the judge?

DON FRANCISCO. No . . . our new priest.

DOÑA PAQUITA. He certainly is. [*Disdainfully.*] He arrived today in a motor car.

DON FRANCISCO. Yes, the place will smell strong of petrol now . . . that's one sure sign of progress.

JUANILLO. [*Popping round the door.*] He says that the village is going to be a garden planted with carnations and roses and [*Scratching his head and trying to remember.*] . . . that he . . . he means to be the gardener . . . and he'll make a nosegay of the gently opening flowers and suck from it honey for the honey comb . . . which is the Church. He's a one-er ain't he? [*He disappears again.*]

DOÑA PAQUITA. A garden of roses! With a few thorns among them he'll soon find.

DON FRANCISCO. These ceremonies take a long time.

DOÑA PAQUITA. Don't talk about it. First the Installation . . . then the Supplicatory Procession. Then a Te Deum . . . a sermon . . . and Heaven knows what else! Still this is the finish of it all, thank God. I tell you, what with one thing and another, we've had a pleasant four months.

DON FRANCISCO. Yes . . . the powers that be at the Archbishop's were a long time making up their minds.

DOÑA PAQUITA. Yes . . . and nobody pleased at the end. For don't imagine the young man likes coming here any more than the old man likes leaving. Do you notice

that he uses a cigarette holder, so as not to stain his fingers? He will like it, won't he, when all the dirty nosed little children come kissing his hand?

DON FRANCISCO. Not quite the village, is it, for fastidious fingers to meddle with?

DOÑA PAQUITA. No, nor for his shiny shoes with their silver buckles. He's here because he's been put here and he has to do as he's told. Why, he has buttonholed everyone from Rome to Santiago to get himself into some church in Madrid. Preaching's what he likes. Showing off, getting talked about . . . he thought he'd be made a Bishop in no time. That's where he was wrong. He tried to be too clever . . . put things in the offices, they say, which were more than even they could stand. So like this world, isn't it? They take the old man from the corner he belongs in because they say he knows too little and they send the young one to eat his heart out in a far off village because they think he knows too much.

DON FRANCISCO. What else does one expect!

DOÑA PAQUITA. Oh well, time will put things right for the young man . . . but only death can do that for the old one.

DON FRANCISCO. Nonsense . . . what are you talking of . . . I never heard such nonsense! What your brother needs at his age . . . is a little rest . . . and peace and quiet.

DOÑA PAQUITA. Rest! You know him. He'll rest in his grave . . . not before. What has his life been? From morning till night, never stopping . . . was ever a single thing done in the village if his hand wasn't in it? Well, can you see him as chaplain to an old woman's almshouse . . . saying mass for them . . . sitting by while they gabble their prayers . . . hearing their confessions; the dreadful things they said to the cat when it stole the milk. He'll fret himself to death. Why you've only to look at him . . . ever since he knew it was settled. He says nothing . . . but what he's thinking and feeling! I know him

so well. But so do you, oh, so do you. But he's all I have in the world, you see . . . he's brother and father and son to me, all in one. And I can't sit by and watch him suffer like this. I can't . . . I can't. What's to become of us!

[JUANILLO *comes from behind the door and turns towards the gate.*]

DOÑA PAQUITA. Where are you going? Is the sermon over?

JUANILLO. No, Señora . . . there's a woman been taken ill . . .

DON FRANCISCO. [*Instinctively standing up; business-like.*] Where?

DOÑA PAQUITA. Who?

JUANILLO. I don't know . . . just someone in there. She was kneeling . . . and then she fell right over on the floor.

DOÑA PAQUITA. Fainted . . . they'd better bring her here.

DON FRANCISCO. Let me see . . . let me see.

[*At this moment* LUCIA *comes in supported by* MATEO *and the* MAYOR, *and followed by the* LADY MAYORESS. *She is half fainting, or, rather pretending to be. She wears a black brocade silk dress, her wedding dress, very elaborate, a lace mantilla, a filigree rosary, diamond ear-rings and brooch, a mother-of-pearl fan and a lace handkerchief. She has all through the scene the manner of a very affected fine lady.*]

DON FRANCISCO. What's the matter?

DOÑA PAQUITA. What has happened?

JUANILLO. Well . . . if it isn't Lucia!

MATEO. [*Very worried.*] Get a chair please, somebody!

THE MAYOR. Please get a glass of water!

[JUANILLO *goes to the back to fetch the water and* DOÑA PAQUITA *pulls out a chair.*]

DOÑA PAQUITA. Loosen her dress.

MATEO. [*Who hasn't noticed* DON FRANCISCO.] Will somebody please go for a doctor . . . at once.

DON FRANCISCO. Now don't be frightened. Let's see what's the matter. Give her a chance to breathe.

THE MAYOR. [*With a mixture of confusion and annoyance.*] Oh . . . oh . . . it's you, is it? Still here!

DON FRANCISCO. Yes, Señor Alcalde . . . though not officially.

MATEO. [*At* LUCIA'S *side and afraid that this is going to be the death of his wife.*] Don Francisco . . . for God's sake . . .

DON FRANCISCO. Don't worry . . . don't worry . . . I *am* here.

[*He goes up to* LUCIA *who continues her pretence of a fainting fit.*]

MATEO. [*Anxiously.*] What's the matter with her?

THE MAYORESS. Nothing whatever.

DON FRANCISCO. She fainted with the heat. She's coming to. It's all right.

MATEO. I warned her . . . I did warn her that in her most delicate condition she must not go into that crowded church!

LUCIA. [*Coming to very prettily.*] Where am I?

MATEO. Here . . . safe with your husband.

LUCIA. [*Affectedly.*] Oh!

JUANILLO. Here's the water.

MATEO. Try to drink some, my darling.

THE MAYOR. But slowly . . . slowly.

LUCIA. Oh . . . my fan!

MATEO. [*Rushing to pick it up.*] Here it is.

THE MAYOR. Shall I fan you? [*He takes his wife's fan for the purpose.*]

LUCIA. No, please . . . I can't bear it. My handkerchief.

THE MAYOR. Here it is!

MATEO. Take mine.

LUCIA. Oh! Wipe my forehead please! Oh!

MATEO. Are you in pain?

THE MAYOR. Aren't you better?

MATEO. Would you like to go home?

THE MAYOR. Shall we have the carriage brought round for you?

LUCIA. No, no . . . I'm better now, thank you. [*She gets up.*] Oh . . . how my head swims!

MATEO. Sit down . . . *please.*

THE MAYOR. Keep still, child . . . just a little longer.

THE MAYORESS. Oh . . . for all our sakes! Suppose anything should happen to our precious jewel!!

LUCIA. Mateo . . . Mateo!

MATEO. What is it?

LUCIA. Your mother . . . your mother is insulting me . . . again.

THE MAYOR. My dear . . . *will* you be quiet?

THE MAYORESS. Yes, I will be when I choose!

MATEO. A nice thing, isn't it, to upset her now! Suppose anything happens . . .

THE MAYOR. . . . in her delicate condition!

THE MAYORESS. Delicate fiddlesticks! I've brought seven children into the world and never fainted over one of them.

LUCIA. No doubt, Señora . . . but some of us are more sensitive, I suppose.

THE MAYORESS. I didn't hear of your fainting three months ago before you were married when you were still washing clothes in the river. And I understand that you'd every right to feel just as delicate then.

LUCIA. [*Collapsing.*] Oh, Mateo! Oh Father, dear Father! Oh!!! [*She affects the classic attack of nerves.*]

MATEO. [*Furious, while he supports her on one side.*] If it weren't that you are my mother . . .

THE MAYOR. [*Threatening, while he supports her on the other.*] If it wasn't that we are . . . where we are . . .

THE MAYORESS. And if you men weren't so easily taken in . . .

DOÑA PAQUITA. Please . . . please don't make so much noise. Every word you say can be heard in the church.

THE MAYORESS. By a dolly draggle-tail who was scrubbing floors three months ago and now if you please she can't lift a feather duster!

LUCIA. Oh—oh—oh! Mateo . . . my heart!

DON FRANCISCO. [*Who is losing patience.*] Look here—young lady—will you stop this nonsense or shall I throw a bucket of water over you?

JUANILLO. Shall I go and fetch one?

LUCIA. [*Taking hold of the doctor's hand.*] Oh, dear, dear Don Francisco!

JUANILLO. Turned into a fine lady in double-quick time, haven't you . . . fainting fits and all! You're no fool . . . I'll say that for you.

LUCIA. Is that Juanillo?

JUANILLO. Oh yes . . . the same old Juanillo as ever . . . and will be for ever and ever, amen! We can't all get up in the world by coming a cropper like you.

LUCIA. You are an impertinent boy.

JUANILLO. That's right—keep it going!—You do it very well.

MATEO. Get out of here . . . or I'll kick you out.

JUANILLO. All right . . . consider me kicked!

DOÑA PAQUITA. Well, Lucia . . . so you're better?

LUCIA. [*A little shamefaced.*] Yes, Señora.

DOÑA PAQUITA. Let's have no more of these scenes then . . . unless you want to send your mother-in-law into a fit.

LUCIA. Suppose you ask her to stop driving me mad!

JUANILLO. [*Who has returned to his post by the small door leading to the Church.*] The service is over! They're coming out . . . they're all coming . . .

[*A movement of curiosity on the part of everyone.* LUCIA *entirely forgetting her faint, goes forward with the others toward the church door. At the same time there come in from the street with huzzas,* DOÑA GER-

TRUDIS, *a lady of fifty summers, pretentiously dressed in black silk, with a mantilla;* THE SCHOOL MISTRESS, *a blue-stocking of twenty-five or thirty;* ROSITA, *a young girl of the village, about eighteen; a little girl; the Colonel of the "Guardia Civil"; and various other ladies, married and unmarried. Also some men.*]

JUANILLO. [*As the ladies appear, in a stage whisper.*] Ha—hum . . . enter the wise Virgins!

DOÑA PAQUITA. Be quiet . . . you blasphemous boy!

DOÑA GERTRUDIS. May we . . . ?

THE SCHOOL MISTRESS. Will you allow us to . . . ?

DOÑA PAQUITA. Yes . . . come in, come in.

DOÑA GERTRUDIS. Forgive us, dear Doña Paquita, won't you, for bursting in on you like this. But these girls . . . they felt they just must kiss our new Priest's hand and . . .

THE COLONEL. Only the girls . . .

DOÑA GERTRUDIS. Now . . . don't be mischievous, Colonel.

ROSITA. [*To* DOÑA PAQUITA.] And you weren't there for the sermon. Oh, I never heard one like it.

DOÑA GERTRUDIS. Such feeling!

THE SCHOOL MISTRESS. And such erudition.

[*They all talk.*]

ROSITA. But what happened to you, Lucia?

LUCIA. It was nothing, dear . . . I felt a little faint. The heat I daresay . . .

THE MAYOR. She's so very delicate . . .

THE MAYORESS. And of course we were frightened . . .

DOÑA GERTRUDIS. And I'm sure that the sermon stirred you very deeply. Such depths of wisdom. You lost all the best of it.

ROSITA. What I liked best was the part about "godly womanhood."

DOÑA GERTRUDIS. Ah no, no! Remember "the mellifluent sweetness of our Redeemer's heart . . ."

THE SCHOOL MISTRESS. The best of all though was that

passage about the soul as a butterfly taking flight, drawn by its intense desire to be consumed in the flame of the Love Divine. [*She looks softly at* THE COLONEL.]

A LADY. And his voice . . . !

A YOUNG LADY. Such gestures . . . !

DOÑA GERTRUDIS. And what a beautifully embroidered rochet!

ROSITA. Made . . . was it not . . . from the fabric of the nipa-palm?

A LADY. It had lace half a yard wide.

THE COLONEL. Well . . . and did our respected schoolmistress enjoy herself?

THE SCHOOL MISTRESS. We all did!

THE COLONEL. Ah, but you discriminate. A thing must be really good before it pleases you.

DOÑA GERTRUDIS. Well, he brought tears to my eyes more than once . . . more than once!

LUCIA. Oh . . . he's coming!

[DON ANTONIO *and* DON JOSÉ MARÍA, *the new priest, come out of the small church door. The latter is a young man of about twenty-eight, he wears his mantle beautifully, elegantly gathered up in one hand, and in the other he is carrying his plush hat, small and tasselled. His hands are very white and perfectly cared for. He wears patent leather shoes with silver buckles. He comes forward slowly and bows with suave inclinations of the head. His eyes are cast down and he is smiling with honeyed sweetness. The actor must be careful to have the necessary affectations, without the slightest approach to caricature.* DON ANTONIO, *as in the first act, is wearing a sotana and threadbare cassock, with elastic boots and has a breviary in his hand and an ordinary tile hat.*]

DOÑA GERTRUDIS. So modest too!

ROSITA. Oh . . . but doesn't he remind one of St. Luiz Gonzaga.

THE COLONEL. Say something, Señora Dominie.

THE SCHOOL MISTRESS. [*Coquettishly.*] Colonel, Colonel, you know my name, don't you?

DON ANTONIO. This is the garden, you see . . . and that is the house. Shall we go in?

DON JOSÉ MARÍA. No . . . no thanks. Time enough . . . time enough!

DON ANTONIO. It's very convenient . . . one can come this way . . . without having to go through the street.

DON JOSÉ MARÍA. What a pretty garden . . . and how well kept!

DON ANTONIO. It has amused my sister to grow a potful of vegetables . . . and a bunch of flowers: Paquita . . . Don José María . . . My sister. [*He introduces them.*]

DON JOSÉ MARÍA. So pleased, Señora . . .

DOÑA PAQUITA. Señor . . .

DON JOSÉ MARÍA. You're a great gardener, I see.

DOÑA PAQUITA. Oh . . . I love flowers. And the earth will always give something in return for one's care of it, will it not? It is easier to strive with than the hearts of men.

[*She moves away.*]

DON JOSÉ MARÍA. And these ladies and gentlemen?

DON ANTONIO. They all want to pay their respects to you, I think . . . if you don't mind.

DON JOSÉ MARÍA. No, no, of course . . . on the contrary . . .

DON ANTONIO. Don Francisco . . . [DON FRANCISCO *has been alone at the back.*] I have the honour to present to you Doctor Don Francisco Lasada . . . my best friend . . . my most valued comrade.

DON FRANCISCO. Your servant.

DON JOSÉ MARÍA. So delighted to know you.

DON ANTONIO. And I have never met his equal.

DON FRANCISCO. [*Smiling.*] Well . . . one's as good as one knows how to be!

DON ANTONIO. You'll come to value him too.

DON JOSÉ MARÍA. You're the Officer of Health for the village, of course.

DON FRANCISCO. I was . . . till a short while ago.

THE MAYOR. [*Putting in his oar where it isn't needed.*] Yes, there's been a new appointment. A younger man . . . your own age . . . and very clever . . .

DON ANTONIO. Our Mayor.

[DON FRANCISCO *and* DOÑA PAQUITA *retire together to one side.*]

DON JOSÉ MARÍA. And so to remain, I hope, for many years.

THE MAYOR. Ah well . . . I'm on the way down hill now, you see. But here's my son [*Indicating* MATEO, *who comes forward with a certain perturbation.*] ready to seize the staff of office . . . when I let it go.

MATEO. [*Not knowing what to say.*] What nonsense, Father!

THE MAYOR. Why, of course, you are . . . ready and anxious too. Don't be ashamed of it. Ready to put the whole world to rights, these young folk, aren't they? And quite right too . . . quite right [*To his wife.*] Come here, my dear. Oh come along, come along . . . nobody's going to eat you. My wife!

DON JOSÉ MARÍA. Delighted to meet you, Señora.

THE MAYORESS. [*Bashfully kissing his hand.*] Oh no . . . I mean yes . . . the pleasure is yours . . . I mean mine . . .

[*A little whispered laughter in the group of women.*]

THE SCHOOL MISTRESS. [*Quietly to the others.*] Now the Lady Mayoress has made her customary happy remark!

THE MAYOR. [*Taking* LUCIA *by the hand.*] And this is our daughter-in-law. Now you can boast that you know all the family. Now make him a pretty speech since you've got yourself up for the occasion.

LUCIA. I . . . oh yes, of course . . .

[*She kisses the priest's hand.*]

THE MAYOR. And we shall want your services soon. There's a christening coming! Ha, ha!

THE MAYORESS. [*Furious.*] Oh, of course . . . we don't escape *that* remark!

THE MAYOR. And remember . . . my house is yours . . . and everything in it. No compliments . . . I mean it.

DON JOSÉ MARÍA. [*Wanting to make an end.*] You are most kind . . . I'm much obliged . . .

DON ANTONIO. [*Presenting* DOÑA GERTRUDIS.] And here is the President of the Sisterhood of Our Lady of Sorrows.

DON JOSÉ MARÍA. Señora . . .

DOÑA GERTRUDIS. [*Kissing his hand.*] Your very devoted servant, Father. And we have such a beautiful image . . . oh but you must have noticed it . . . in the church.

DON JOSÉ MARÍA. I have indeed.

DOÑA GERTRUDIS. Ah, but she's not at her best now . . . as dowdy, I'm afraid as . . . well, as I am. We fully meant her to have a new mantle for the Novena. But it couldn't be managed. No, as usual, these girls [*Indicating* ROSITA.] got everything.

ROSITA. [*Offended.*] Oh, you shouldn't say that!

DON JOSÉ MARÍA. I beg your pardon . . .

DON ANTONIO. This young lady, you see, is President of the Association of the Daughters of Mary.

ROSITA. Your reverence . . . [*She too kisses his hand.*]

DON JOSÉ MARÍA. God bless you.

DOÑA GERTRUDIS. [*Persisting.*] But it is so . . . the Daughters of Mary get everything that's going. And I suppose it's natural, because they're young, and when it comes to begging, of course, people give more readily to a young girl than to an old woman.

ROSITA. Oh, but don't you think it's a little because our Virgin is so much prettier?

DOÑA GERTRUDIS. Certainly not, child . . . our Virgin is far more distinguished . . . and far more appealing too . . . with those tears on her cheeks.

ROSITA. [*To* DON JOSÉ MARÍA.] Well . . . you must be the judge, Father . . .

DON JOSÉ MARÍA. [*Smiling.*] Ladies, ladies, there is but one Holy Virgin and her joy is the same in the worship offered to her through every one of her images.

THE SCHOOL MISTRESS. Oh, it's no use, Father, you'll never get them to believe that. It's to these villages one must come, I'm afraid, to find true materialism.

[DON JOSÉ MARÍA *looks at her with some alarm.*]

DON ANTONIO. [*Smiling at the poor girl's inoffensive pedantry.*] This lady is the head of our elementary school.

THE SCHOOL MISTRESS. Yes . . . only a school teacher, and your humble parishioner, Señor. [*She kisses his hand.*]

THE MAYOR. But she knows Latin!

DON JOSÉ MARÍA. [*Without enthusiasm.*] Does she indeed!

THE SCHOOL MISTRESS. A few words, oh, hardly more. Just enough to let me read the works of the Fathers in my moments of leisure.

DON ANTONIO. [*Going on with the introduction.*] Our commandant here, Colonel Manuel Ramirez of the Civil Guard.

THE COLONEL. At your command!

DON JOSÉ MARÍA. Señor . . .

[*They all surround him now, while he bows and smiles and the women kiss his hand in fierce rivalry.*]

A LADY. Welcome . . . welcome from us all, Señor Cura . . .

A YOUNG LADY. And we hope that you'll stay here many, many years . . .

ANOTHER. And that you'll be so happy among us . . .

DEMETRIO. And preach us lots more sermons like today's . . .

NICETO. May we all be spared to hear 'em!

THE MAYOR. Come, come now . . . we mustn't tire him out.

DON JOSÉ MARÍA. Oh indeed, you do nothing of the sort!

DOÑA PAQUITA. [*A little bitterly to* DON FRANCISCO.] They'll come to blows over him in a minute.

DON FRANCISCO. Children with a new toy!

DON JOSÉ MARÍA. Dear ladies . . . gentlemen . . .

SEVERAL PEOPLE. He's going to speak . . . he's going to speak!

DOÑA GERTRUDIS. Sh! Sh!

THE MAYOR. Hear, hear! Hear, hear!

DON JOSÉ MARÍA. No, really . . . I had no intention . . .

THE SCHOOL MISTRESS. Oh yes, yes, Father . . . say a word to us.

DON JOSÉ MARÍA. Why, I have nothing to say . . . [*But already he has dropped into his honeyed rhetorical tone.*] . . . except that I am deeply, deeply grateful for the kindness . . . so little merited by me . . . and the warmth of my welcome to this enlightened village and for the trust with which it so readily begins to honour me . . .

THE MAYOR. The honour is ours . . . the honour is ours!

THE MAYORESS. [*Pulling his cloak.*] Don't interrupt him!

THE MAYOR. Don't interrupt *me!*

DON JOSÉ MARÍA. To-day . . : this past hour . . . and above all this passing moment stamp an ineffaceable memory in my heart. I bring to your service little power of mind, no store of knowledge, much unworthiness . . . but leaning, in my feebleness upon the strength of Him to whom all things are possible I do believe that I shall not quite utterly betray the hopes on which you build when with a simple and a touching faith, springing from the pure depths of love and fellowship, you hold out such a welcome to this unworthy servant of the Most High.

JUANILLO. [*Admiringly.*] Good Lord . . . you'd think he must have learnt it all by heart before.

DON JOSÉ MARÍA. But I . . . I ask your aid. Together we must labour in the mystic garden of our souls' Beloved. Alone I can do little. It will be your task . . . as when of old Aaron and Caleb so stood by Moses on the mountain . . . to strengthen and sustain the drooping hands I lift to God!

SEVERAL LOW VOICES. Yes, yes, indeed.

NICETO. That's the sort of priest for me!

DEMETRIO. Look out . . . there's the old one's sister listening . . .

DON JOSÉ MARÍA. But let me . . . taking up the staff that makes me shepherd of your fold . . . add now a word, inadequate I know, of gratitude and praise to him whom I succeed. For many years he has watched over you with patience and with skill that has indeed not had to be its own reward. The Will that orders all things calls him to well-earned repose. From his hands I take my sacred charge. In your name and my own I ask him, in the peace of his retreat, the evening of his days not to forget to pray for his old flock and for their new shepherd.

[*He gives his hand to* DON ANTONIO *with signs of great emotion. There are murmurs of admiration.*]

DON ANTONIO. God help you through your task. You'll find other things than roses in the garden . . . sometimes.

THE MAYOR. Well, come now . . . what have you had to complain of?

DON ANTONIO. [*Serene and grave.*] God did not ask me for complaints. We have been together—I among you all—for thirty years. I came so young . . . now that I leave you I'm so old that somehow all my life is left behind . . . I wish I could have laid my body here as well. But God has willed that otherwise . . . blessed be His name. Forgive me for the things in which I have offended you. I always wished you well. We all make mistakes. And I forgive, with all my heart indeed, any unkindness that has been done to me. And I'll never forget you . . . any

of you . . . nor the village . . . as long as I live . . . because . . . I can't go on . . . I . . . God keep and help us all.

JUANILLO. [*To steel himself against tears.*] Damn . . . !

[*There is a deep silence; no one moves, nor gives the least sign of approbation. After the flowers of rhetoric of the new priest, the other's simple speech leaves the assemblage cold.* MATEO, *alone, after a moment, goes up to the old man and presses his hand.*]

MATEO. [*With a little embarrassment.*] You know just how we feel . . .

DON ANTONIO. [*More touched than he wants to show.*] Thank you . . . thank you, my dear boy.

THE MAYOR. [*After another brief moment of silence.*] Well, well . . . we mustn't waste time here. There's a small—ah—collation ready in the Town Hall. [*To* DON JOSÉ MARÍA.] You must honour us by coming.

DON JOSÉ MARÍA. Oh . . . but to go to all that trouble! With pleasure . . . with the greatest pleasure.

THE MAYOR. Let's be off then . . . or the chocolate will be getting cold. Come along, come along, everyone's welcome . . . plenty there for us all.

DON JOSÉ MARÍA. [*To* DON ANTONIO.] Señor . . .

DON ANTONIO. No . . . forgive me if I don't come. I've a few little things still to pack . . . and my train goes at six.

DON JOSÉ MARÍA. But . . . are you going today?

DON ANTONIO. Yes indeed . . . my sister will give the house keys to the sacristan.

THE MAYOR. [*Wishing to appear polite.*] But there's no hurry, you know . . . at least as far as the house is concerned. Don José María can consider himself my guest for as long as he pleases. [*As* DON JOSÉ MARÍA *bows depreciatingly.*] No, I mean it, I mean it.

DON ANTONIO. No, I've finished everything now. Besides . . . [*With a little smile.*] my old ladies will be

expecting me. There's my installation to think of, you know.

THE MAYOR. That's right . . . each in his turn! Well . . . till we meet again.

DON JOSÉ MARÍA. Good-bye, good-bye. And remember . . . anything I can do for you . . . at any time . . .

DON ANTONIO. Yes, yes. Good luck to your work here.

DON JOSÉ MARÍA. [*To* PAQUITA *who bows but does not speak.*] Señora. . . . [*To* DON FRANCISCO.] Good afternoon, doctor.

DON FRANCISCO. Good afternoon.

[*They are all going out,* LUCIA *with the others, without paying any more attention to those who are left behind.* MATEO *detains her.*]

MATEO. [*To* LUCIA, *with a little reproach in his tone.*] Say a word to your godmother.

LUCIA. [*As a duty and wanting to get it over.*] Anything I could do for you . . . if I stayed . . . ?

DOÑA PAQUITA. No, child, thank you . . . everything's done.

THE MAYOR. [*From the gate.*] Lucia . . . Mateo . . . come along.

LUCIA. I'm just coming.

DOÑA PAQUITA. Yes . . . off with you!

MATEO. I shan't say good-bye . . . we'll be down at the station.

DON ANTONIO. All right . . . run away . . . run away!

[*Everyone goes out, except* DON ANTONIO, DON FRANCISCO, DOÑA PAQUITA *and* JUANILLO. *They don't speak. A gay peal of bells is heard; they are setting off rockets in the street, and a band of music, supposed to be stationed there, begins to play a quick-step, in front of the church, awaiting the exit of the new priest.*]

JUANILLO. [*Who, on hearing the music and the rockets,*

forgets everything else, and dashes toward the street.] Rockets!

DOÑA PAQUITA. [*With deep reproach.*] Juanillo!

DON ANTONIO. Why . . . let him go, Paquita.

JUANILLO. [*Very conscience-stricken.*] No, Father, I wasn't going . . . I wasn't really.

DOÑA PAQUITA. [*Making an effort to appear calm.*] I'll make sure that nothing has been forgotten. [*To* JUANILLO.] You come with me.

DON ANTONIO. Very well . . . fetch me when you're ready.

[DOÑA PAQUITA *and* JUANILLO *go out. The sound of music and bells goes on for an instant. The last rockets are fired off.* DON ANTONIO, *overcome by emotion, falls on a chair, and leaning his head on the stone table sheds a few tears; afterwards he makes a great effort to be calm, and succeeds.*]

DON ANTONIO. [*In a broken voice.*] God's will be done . . . His will be done. [*He dries his eyes with his bare hands.*] Ay . . . ay! [*To* DON FRANCISCO *bitterly.*] all that my courage really comes to, you see. Don't despise me.

DON FRANCISCO. Well—if you mean to begin trying to hide things from me at this time of day . . .

DON ANTONIO. Our work's done, my friend.

DON FRANCISCO. Yes, indeed . . . over and done with.

DON ANTONIO. Oh, this village . . . this village!

[*They both speak excitedly and with emotion, and at first, each one as if he were talking only to himself and with himself.*]

DON FRANCISCO. [*Walking from one side to another.*] I remember the day I came. What a hideous and impossible place I thought it. I said to my wife—I won't stay here a week. Well . . . that's thirty years ago.

DON ANTONIO. More.

DON FRANCISCO. [*A little grudgingly.*] And the odd

thing is that one ends by having some sort of feeling . . . an affection . . . for all the savagery and indecency of it.

DON ANTONIO. And for this hard dry land beyond . . . and . . . oh the harder hearts of its people.

DON FRANCISCO. Yes . . . I suppose if we labour at the plough long enough the ass-thistles in the furrows get to look like roses . . . we see no others.

DON ANTONIO. Well . . . at least we *have* laboured!

DON FRANCISCO. We have! When I think how I've travelled these roads . . . in the glaring sun . . . not a tree on all the length of them . . . summer after summer . . .

DON ANTONIO. And these hearts of stone . . . knocking at them day by day. . . .

DON FRANCISCO. I sold my horse yesterday. Well, I've no use for him now. My wife cried when they took him away.

DON ANTONIO. And you're staying on, are you . . . to watch your successor? That takes some courage.

DON FRANCISCO. Does it! But where am I to go at my age? The boys will be breaking loose—they've their own way to make. I have a bit of land, you know. My wife and I can live very simply . . . and she thinks stopping on in the house where they were born . . . where they were children . . . will be almost like having them with her still. Women will indulge themselves in these fancies. But there's nothing else left for me . . . except to be lazy while the other man does his work . . . my work . . . ! and to console myself by thinking—though it mayn't be at all true—that I should be doing it better. Time heals all wounds!

DON ANTONIO. God heals them, Señor Don Francisco.

DON FRANCISCO. The same thing!

DON ANTONIO. [*Passionately.*] It is not . . . it is not the same thing. Do you think if I didn't *know* it was the will of God that I could be patient while my life . . . my whole life . . . was torn up by its roots?

DON FRANCISCO. Well, you know . . . what can't be cured must be endured.

DON ANTONIO. Yes . . . if God gives us strength to endure. Beneath the wings of his pity we are still. His will be done, we say.

DON FRANCISCO. Oh yes, we keep still because a wise instinct teaches us that keeping still is the proper prescription for dangerously wounded men.

DON ANTONIO. And you are content to believe, are you, . . . even in such an hour as this . . . that there's no God watching over you . . . that you must stand in this friendless world alone?

DON FRANCISCO. I'm not alone! What about my wife? We've been happy together these forty years. What about you? And if I lost everything else I'd have my conscience still.

DON ANTONIO. But doesn't that whisper to you . . . doesn't it? . . . of something beyond and above, something more enduring that can give us the answer to this desperate riddle of our life?

DON FRANCISCO. I shall be quite content to have lived it honourably.

DON ANTONIO. I don't understand . . . no, I do not understand how you can so have lost your faith.

DON FRANCISCO. Bless you, I haven't . . . I never had any . . . and never felt the need of it.

DON ANTONIO. You've never prayed . . . your heart has never turned to God . . . you mean to die and not to ask him to go with you upon that unknown journey?

DON FRANCISCO. When I was a child I used to pray with my mother . . . to please her. I still have the rosary that she said so many paternosters over . . . and that I fell asleep over so many times. When I was first married I went to Mass with my wife . . . to please *her*. If I die first, I'll have them call a priest . . . to set her mind at rest. If she has gone before me, I shall die quietly enough,

without ceremony. What is there to fear? One will fall asleep like a child in his mother's arms.

DON ANTONIO. Oh, Señor Don Francisco.

DON FRANCISCO. No, believe me, dear old friend . . . there's only one thing that matters . . . to be an honest man. And I'm sometimes afraid that is settled for each of us . . . whether or no . . . when we're born. And everything else is illusion . . . hysteria in some people . . . gross superstition in others. Your dreams are very beautiful, my friend, because . . . well, it is your own nature makes them so. You have faith in God, you hope for Heaven. But tell me now, truthfully . . . suppose you were to lose all faith, all hope, could you, for any price the world might offer . . . could you do a wicked thing?

DON ANTONIO. [*Humbly and sweetly.*] I don't know . . . really I don't know. We are all weak creatures.

DON FRANCISCO. Weak . . . and brave!

DOÑA PAQUITA *and* JUANILLO *enter.* DOÑA PAQUITA *is carrying the image of the virgin, a small bag and a case containing a chalice and paten.* JUANILLO *has a basket with food for the journey and other packages.* DOÑA PAQUITA *shuts and locks the door of the house.*]

DOÑA PAQUITA. [*Turning the key.*] There . . . that's done.

DON ANTONIO. Everything?

DOÑA PAQUITA. Every single thing. I'm going to hand over the keys. [*She calls into the Church.*] Benito! Benito! [*There is no answer.*] Juanillo, take them to the Sacristy.—Here.

JUANILLO. He's off to the Town Hall . . . if there's chocolate going.

[*He starts to go out with the keys and the basket.*]

DOÑA PAQUITA. Leave that basket now. If you lose that we'll have no lunch. [JUANILLO *goes off.*] Have you anything to put in the bag?

DON ANTONIO. My breviary.

[*He gives her the breviary which is bound in coarse black cloth and* DOÑA PAQUITA *packs it in the bag.*]

DON FRANCISCO. [*Taking up the case with the chalice in it.*] What's this?

DOÑA PAQUITA. His chalice. That's our only valuable.

DON ANTONIO. My godmother gave it me when I said my first Mass. Yes . . . it had better go in the bag.

[DOÑA PAQUITA *packs the case with the chalice in the bag.*]

DOÑA PAQUITA. I'll wrap the Virgin in a handkerchief . . . then she can go in too.

DON ANTONIO. No, no . . . I'll carry her.

DOÑA PAQUITA. Here's the carriage already.

DON ANTONIO. Well now . . . you go on with Juanillo . . . and I'll walk. That won't be so conspicuous.

DOÑA PAQUITA. We shan't be noticed anyway if we take the short cut. [*To* DON FRANCISCO.] Are you coming?

DON FRANCISCO. Yes, Señora.

[JUANILLO *comes back.*]

JUANILLO. [*Licking his lips.*] Oh yes . . . he was there! And I tell you they're having no end of a time. They gave me a meringue through the window.

[PAQUITA *suddenly breaks down, and bursts into tears.*]

DOÑA PAQUITA. Oh God . . . Oh God!

DON ANTONIO. [*Trying to quiet her.*] Come now, Paquita . . . Come . . .

DOÑA PAQUITA. We're so old . . . we're all so old . . . such a little time left us. Surely . . . surely . . . you'd think they could have waited . . . just for a little.

DON FRANCISCO. Young people have no patience, Señora.

DOÑA PAQUITA. [*With passionate grief.*] No, nor pity.

DON ANTONIO. Remember that God knows what is best for us, my dear. There now, go along . . . and don't let them see you crying.

DON FRANCISCO. Yes . . . yes. Come . . . come.

[*He gives his arm to* DOÑA PAQUITA, *and picks up the bag*—DOÑA PAQUITA *takes some of the packages, and they go.*]

JUANILLO. [*Breaking out uncontrollably.*] I can't stand it . . . I won't stand it! And that brute in there stuffing himself with sweets and wine and everything! Shall I go wait at the Plaza and throw a stone at him when he comes out? Shall I? Shall I?

DON ANTONIO. [*Horrified.*] God preserve us . . . certainly not! Do you know what you are saying! [*He gently draws the lad to him.*] Now listen, my child. This that has happened is God's will . . . and no one . . . do you understand? . . . no one is to blame. Never speak like that again. And never think of committing such a mortal sin.

JUANILLO. [*Vaguely comprehending, from the priest's agitation, that he has said something atrocious.*] No, Father . . . I won't . . . If you say so . . . but I . . . [*He bursts into tears.*]

DON ANTONIO. There then . . . run along . . . take the basket . . . we'll say no more about it.

[JUANILLO *takes the basket and goes out.* DON ANTONIO *remains alone for a moment, takes a long look about the garden, as if to say good-bye to it, sighs, and going slowly to the table, takes the image of the Virgin in his arms, and says to it, with love and resignation, but simplicity.*]

DON ANTONIO. And now . . . we must go too, Holy Mother.

[*He lifts the little statue and goes.*]

CURTAIN.

WIFE TO A FAMOUS MAN

COMEDY IN TWO ACTS

TEATRO DE APOLO MADRID

1914

CHARACTERS

MARIANA.
SEÑORA ANDREA.
THE APPRENTICE.
CARMEN.
LOLA.
JULIETA.
NATI.
JOSÉ MARÍA.
SEÑOR RAMÓN.
A REPORTER.
SEÑOR JULIÁN.
A POSTMAN.
SEVERAL NEIGHBOURS.

ACT I

The ironing-room in a public laundry. At the back the door and the show-window look out on a street in Madrid. At the right is a door which leads into the other rooms. There are a table and stove for heating irons, and another table with baskets in which linen garments may be placed, some ironed, some ready to be ironed. There is also a wardrobe, with a looking-glass, of white enamelled wood.

In the foreground, at the left, is a clothes-horse, and near it an armchair in which SEÑORA ANDREA *is sitting. Two laundresses and a girl apprentice are working at the ironing table. At* SEÑORA ANDREA'S *right and near the clothes-horse is a wooden cradle in which a baby is lying. There is a display of ironed linen in the show window.*

At the rising of the curtain there can be heard in the street the noise of voices and of people running. The three work-women leave their ironing and dash to the door.

THE VOICES. [*In the street.*] Yes! . . . Oh yes! . . . There! . . . Up there! . . . yes . . . no. . . .

THE WORKWOMEN. [*Running to the door.*] Let's see! . . . Oh, let's see!

ANDREA. Here . . . you . . . Carmen . . . Lola!

[*The girls pay no attention to her. She tries to get up and go after them, but is prevented by her rheumatism, and sits down again.*]

Oh, these legs of mine! [*To the child in the cradle, who is supposed to be crying.*] Will you be quiet . . . you little

demon! [*Anxiously, to the laundresses.*] Is it coming? Is it coming?

CARMEN. Yes, Señora . . . yes! . . . yes! . . .

LOLA. No, Señora . . . no! . . . no! . . .

ANDREA. Well, which do you mean?

THE APPRENTICE. It must have been a comet or something.

ANDREA. Get back to your work then . . . wasting time like this! You'll see what your mistress will have to say to you presently. [*Then to the child again.*] Oh, be quiet, you limb of Satan!

A NEWSBOY IN THE STREET. Extra! Herald! Extra!

ANDREA. Here . . . you . . . Carmen, Lola, get a paper!

[CARMEN *goes out and comes back with the paper.*]

CARMEN. Here it is!

[*They all crowd round* ANDREA.]

ANDREA. Read it . . . read it!

CARMEN. [*Reading.*] "Aviation Race . . . Nice, Marseilles, Barcelona, Madrid. . . ."

ANDREA. Go on . . . go on!

CARMEN. [*Reading.*] "Cuenca, 4 p. m. The Bleriot monoplane piloted by the Spanish aviator, José María Lopez, is now passing over the town . . . flying rapidly."

ANDREA. [*In rapture.*] Oh, . . . my darling boy!

CARMEN. [*Reading.*] "He should reach Madrid in about twenty minutes."

ANDREA. Oh . . . my precious one! The first! Will he come in first?

LOLA. It looks like it now . . . yes, Señora.

ANDREA. Oh . . . my José María!

THE APPRENTICE. If he does get in first . . . he'll have a good handful of dollars.

LOLA. The first prize . . . a hundred thousand *pesetas*.

CARMEN. And five hundred from the Mayor!

LOLA. And a cup from the King!

CARMEN. And another from the Aero Club!

THE APPRENTICE. And then won't you give yourself airs, Señora Andrea?

ANDREA. [*To the child.*] Will you lie quiet . . . or won't you? [*To* THE APPRENTICE.] Here, you . . . take the little wretch and walk him up and down. See if that'll quiet him.

THE APPRENTICE. [*Taking the baby and walking to and fro.*] There, darling . . . hush, my pretty one . . . my little poppet. Father's going to be ever such a famous man . . . ever . . . such . . . a . . . famous . . . man. [*But apparently the child is not comforted.*]

LOLA. He's hungry.

ANDREA. Well, then, where's his mother?

CARMEN. A lot of use she'd be to him, with the suspense she's been in!

THE APPRENTICE. [*Who wants an excuse to get out.*] Shan't I take him out in the street? That might quiet him.

ANDREA. Oh, take him to the devil if you like! And the rest of you, get on with your work. The irons will be in a fine state, won't they?

CARMEN. Oh, but today's not like any other day, is it, Señora Andrea?

THE APPRENTICE. [*Who was on the point of going out, but stopped seeing the approach of* RAMÓN.] Here's Señor Ramón.

[RAMÓN *comes in from the street.*]

ANDREA. What's happened? What are you back for? There's nothing wrong?

CARMEN. Has he got in yet?

RAMÓN. [*Very solemnly.*] Not yet. He is about to. No, Señora Andrea, nothing has happened. I have come to fetch a fan and a bottle of smelling salts for my poor daughter . . . who is in a state of nerves. . . .

CARMEN. Well . . . I don't wonder!

LOLA. I'll get it!

[*She goes out of the door at the right.*]

ANDREA. [*In a sarcastic tone.*] Oh, of course . . . hurry . . . hurry! Suppose the poor delicate creature goes off in a faint!

RAMÓN. Well, if she can't go off in one today, I should like to know when she can!

THE APPRENTICE. [*With conviction.*] So should I!

CARMEN. What with the suspense . . . !

RAMÓN. Why shouldn't she be faint seeing it's the first time in his life her husband ever did anything for anybody. It's enough to make her . . . faint with surprise.

ANDREA. [*Very irritated.*] Is that an insult?

RAMÓN. I don't know, Señora . . . but it's the truth.

[CARMEN *returns to the ironing-table, and* THE APPRENTICE, *with the baby in her arms, goes out by the street door.*]

ANDREA. May I ask what you expect of my son?

RAMÓN. I don't expect anything; but three *pesetas* a day to keep house on might not be too much perhaps for my daughter to look for?

ANDREA. Your daughter . . . poor unlucky woman! Picked out by the handsomest man in Madrid!

RAMÓN. And the greatest scamp ever born in Spain!

ANDREA. Oh . . . then you come from foreign parts?

RAMÓN. Señora Andrea. . . .

ANDREA. I didn't know!

RAMÓN. Is a woman like my daughter to marry and then work her fingers to the bone to support her husband?

ANDREA. Well, since before she was married she had the pleasure of supporting her father, it mayn't seem so very odd to her after all.

RAMÓN. She supported *me?*

ANDREA. And hasn't had a chance to break herself of the habit!

RAMÓN. Señora Andrea. . . .

ANDREA. [*Looking him up and down.*] Why bless me . . . I thought so . . . if you haven't bought yourself a new cap!

RAMÓN. [*Surveying her from top to toe also.*] And I notice that you've got a pair of new shoes . . . though what use they are to you . . . sitting here all day long . . . !

ANDREA. One takes a fancy to a thing sometimes. . . .

RAMÓN. [*Regarding the shoes.*] They must have cost seventeen *pesetas.*

ANDREA. Twenty.

RAMÓN. Fancy . . . yes, fancy's the word! [*Maliciously.*] A present from your son?

ANDREA. No, Señora; nor from your daughter.

RAMÓN. Then I suppose you're in debt to the shoemaker.

ANDREA. I'm in debt to nobody. I paid for them out of my own pocket.

RAMÓN. [*Incredulously.*] Four dollars, all at once?

ANDREA. Six; I won a prize in the lottery last week.

RAMÓN. Then I think you might have given your friends a treat. . . .

ANDREA. And who did you treat with the nine *pesetas* you won at cards the other day, I should like to know?

LOLA. [*Coming in.*] The smelling salts!

RAMÓN. [*Taking the bottle.*] All right.

[*He is just about to leave as* MARIANA, *accompanied by three or four women neighbours, comes in by the street door.*]

1ST NEIGHBOUR. He's got here! He's arrived!

[*They all rush to meet* MARIANA.]

ANDREA. Mariana!

RAMÓN. My child!

THE LAUNDRESSES. Señora!

[THE APPRENTICE *enters behind* MARIANA, *with the baby in her arms.*

ANDREA. But you're alone!

MARIANA. Yes . . . yes. . . .

RAMÓN. Why . . . how is that?

[MATI *and* PEPITO, *two of* MARIANA'S *children, aged seven and nine, have come in with her. They both seize hold of their mother.*]

MATI. Mama!

PEPITO. Mama!

[MARIANA *caresses the two children.*]

THE APPRENTICE. [*Giving her the baby.*] Here's another one! He's been howling for you.

MARIANA. Darling! Precious! Angel!

[*She is in such a state of emotion and excitement that she can hardly speak.*]

CARMEN. [*Bringing a chair.*] Sit down, Señora.

[*They all surround her.*]

RAMÓN. Here are the smelling salts.

MARIANA. A little late, aren't they?

1ST NEIGHBOUR. Take a sniff anyway, it never does you any harm.

LOLA. Yes . . . and you all upset!

THE APPRENTICE. [*Taking away the baby from her.*] And you're in no state to bother with him, I'm sure!

ANDREA. Oh, tell us all about it . . . tell us what happened.

MARIANA. Nothing . . . it . . . it just came [*To her father.*] after you went away.

RAMÓN. My luck . . . when I'd waited for him seven hours!

ANDREA. Well, go on . . . go on. What else?

MARIANA. Nothing else. It came. It flew up like a great bird, fast and high, and you could scarcely see it, and then it dropped down, down . . . all the way down, and then it stopped . . . and there he was . . . so jolly as ever!

RAMÓN. Oh, he's always jolly!

ANDREA. [*In ecstasy.*] There's nobody to touch my son!

RAMÓN. Indeed!

ANDREA. Well, but where is he now?

MARIANA. He's in the grand stand with the King and

the Queen and the government and the people from the Aero Club, and a whole crowd of ladies and gentlemen. They're all drinking champagne and eating cakes.

THE APPRENTICE. Did he speak to you?

MARIANA. Of course!

LOLA. What did he say?

MARIANA. Oh, nothing!

RAMÓN. And you came away and left him?

MARIANA. Looks like it!

ANDREA. But isn't he coming?

MARIANA. Of course . . . as soon as they'll let him.

1ST NEIGHBOUR. Well, my dear . . . you must be a happy woman!

MARIANA. Yes . . . I am.

2ND NEIGHBOUR. With all the money he'll make . . . you'll have nothing to worry about now!

1ST NEIGHBOUR. Why, you'll be giving up the laundry.

MARIANA. Yes . . . I suppose I shall.

1ST NEIGHBOUR. They'll give him a decoration.

RAMÓN. Of course they will.

CARMEN. And a banquet!

LOLA. And his picture will be in all the papers!

THE APPRENTICE. Do you know . . . our district councillor said that, as he's the first Madrid man to win an aeroplane race, they're sure to name a street after him, as soon as he's been dead ten years.

CARMEN. I wouldn't trust 'em to keep it in mind that long.

THE APPRENTICE. Oh, but they can't do it till he's dead . . . because they say they've been taken in so often.

RAMÓN. Well, that's true. Just as sure as you name a street after a man, he goes and disgraces himself afterwards . . . and of course that may happen to anyone . . . then they get the blame.

1ST NEIGHBOUR. That's true!

RAMÓN. Wait till a man turns up his toes, I say, before you call him a hero.

ANDREA. Will you please stop talking about turning up toes?

1ST NEIGHBOUR. [*Taking her leave.*] Well, congratulations, Señora Andrea.

ANDREA. Thank you very much, I'm sure.

2ND NEIGHBOUR. Mine too, Mariana.

NEIGHBOURS. [*Taking their leave.*] Good-bye . . . good-bye . . . good-bye. . . . Good luck to you . . . best wishes . . .

MARIANA. [*Going with them to the door.*] Thanks . . . thanks.

[*The neighbours go out.* MARIANA, *who is still very nervous, begins to talk to the laundresses and to her children—who follow her about like dogs—all in the same breath.*]

MARIANA. Get on with your work now . . . all of you! The irons must be in a fine state. And you [*To the children.*] go and put on your pinafores; you mustn't mess up the only decent clothes you've got.

[*The children go out by the door on the right, and return shortly with their pinafores on.* MARIANA, *in the meantime has taken off her crape handkerchief and put it away in the wardrobe with the mirror, afterwards putting the key in her pocket. Then she turns to the* APPRENTICE.]

MARIANA. Give me the baby [*She takes the child from her.*] and get the linen ready for 57 Carmen Street. It's got to go back this afternoon without fail.

[THE APPRENTICE *places some freshly ironed shirts, collars, and cuffs in a basket and covers them with a cloth.*]

MARIANA. Hurry up now . . . it's getting late . . . and of course you've not done a thing because I've been away!

RAMÓN. My child, you are a regular demon for work!

ANDREA. Yes indeed . . . whoever else would go on slaving like this?

MARIANA. Well, someone has to. How else d'you think the world goes on?

RAMÓN. But why worry now? You're going to be rich!

MARIANA. Oh, going to be no doubt. But till I am someone's got to pay for the dinner . . . haven't they? [*Seeing that the* APPRENTICE *is about to go out with the basket.*] Here, let's have a look. [*Examining the ironing.*] Who ironed those collars? It'll be a miracle if they're not sent back. Get along now . . . and hurry back.

ANDREA. [*To the* APPRENTICE.] Child!

THE APPRENTICE. What is it?

ANDREA. As you are going out, bring me back a lamb pasty. What with all this commotion . . . I'm famishing!

THE APPRENTICE. The cheap sort, or the best?

ANDREA. Oh no, bring the best, the others are nothing but pastry. Give her the money, Mariana, please, then I shan't have to change a dollar, and that's all I have.

[*She says this after searching her pockets, but with the evident intention of not producing anything.*]

MARIANA. [*Resignedly giving the money to the* APPRENTICE.] Here you are.

RAMÓN. Here, child.

THE APPRENTICE. [*Returning from the door.*] What is it?

RAMÓN. As you're going that way, bring me a packet of cigarettes . . . and see they're the best . . . and that they're not damp now. Ah, and a box of wax matches. Well . . . what are you waiting for?

THE APPRENTICE. The money. They don't give credit.

RAMÓN. Here you are! . . . [*He searches in his waistcoat, but doesn't take out anything.*] I must have left it in my other waistcoat! Ask your mistress . . . she's going to be rich now.

THE APPRENTICE. Señora?

MARIANA. [*Giving her the money.*] Oh, take it, and

be off with you. [*She walks from one side to the other with the baby in her arms.*] Now, where did I put the order book?

ANDREA. Oh, do sit down and rest a minute, woman, if you can. It makes me dizzy to see you.

RAMÓN. [*Taking away the order book which she is turning over.*] Let it alone now. Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Haven't you ever been taught that a hundred thousand *pesetas* are twenty thousand dollars and don't you know that from today on all this laundry and ironing won't matter any more than a drop of water in a pond?

[*A man is seen standing at the street door. He is a newspaper reporter.*]

REPORTER. May I . . . ?

MARIANA. Come in. What can I do for you?

REPORTER. Does José María López, the aviator, live here?

MARIANA. Yes, Señor, he lives here; but he's not at home.

REPORTER. [*Pompously.*] Thank you, . . . I know that. I have only just left him. Could I speak to his wife for a moment?

[*Through all this the laundresses are coming in and going out, busy with their work.*]

MARIANA. [*First amazed and then horrified.*] With me? What's the matter? Great Heavens! Has anything happened to him? . . . Has he been hurt? . . . Oh, José María! [*Begins to cry.*] What? . . . What? . . .

ANDREA. [*Also weeping.*] Oh, my boy . . . my precious boy! . . .

MARIANA. And I saw him not five minutes ago . . . safe and sound!

ANDREA. Oh! Holy Mother of Sorrows!

[*At this point the laundresses, from the ironing table, also begin to shriek.*]

REPORTER. [*Alarmed and trying to quiet them.*] Ladies . . . for God's sake . . . do be calm. Nothing

has happened . . . I swear to you that nothing has happened.

MARIANA. Honestly . . . nothing?

ANDREA. Nothing?

REPORTER. Absolutely nothing.

MARIANA. Well . . . you might have said so sooner!

ANDREA. You gave us a very bad turn, young man!

REPORTER. [*Confused.*] But, my dear ladies . . . how was I to suppose that you'd take it into your heads that . . . I'm very sorry.

RAMÓN. Women always expect the worst! Take a seat, please.

MARIANA. Sit down, Señor, do! And please excuse us, because with all that's going on today we're in such a state that we don't seem to know what will happen next.

REPORTER. Thank you. I haven't time.

MARIANA. Well . . . tell us what we can do for you.

REPORTER. You must forgive my coming like this when I haven't the pleasure of knowing you. . . .

MARIANA. Oh . . . the pleasure is mine.

RAMÓN. The pleasure is ours.

REPORTER. But I am from the *Evening Herald*. . . .

RAMÓN. [*With admiration.*] A reporter!

REPORTER. A reporter.

RAMÓN. Sit down. Sit down, Sir.

REPORTER. [*Sitting down to escape more invitations.*] Thanks! Well, you know . . . we want . . . in tonight's edition, before anyone else gets ahead of us . . . to have a full account of the great event . . . and it seemed to me no one could give me better help in making a good story of it than the wife of our famous man himself.

MARIANA. Do you mean me?

REPORTER. I do, Señora. So, if you don't mind . . . [*He has his note-book out.*]

RAMÓN. Oh, why should we mind?

REPORTER. Tell me now . . . what emotions have been aroused in you by your husband's brilliant triumph?

MARIANA. Oh . . . what am I to say?

ANDREA. Say what comes into your head.

MARIANA. Well, that's just it . . . nothing does.

RAMÓN. Suppose I ask her. She looks as if she could eat you . . . but she's really only shy. What the gentleman wants to know is if you're pleased that he won the first prize?

MARIANA. Well . . . of course!

REPORTER. You didn't expect it, did you?

MARIANA. No, Señor.

REPORTER. But why didn't you?

MARIANA. Well . . . because I didn't.

RAMÓN. I will tell you; she didn't expect it because, up to today, she's only been used to having him make a mess of everything. There . . . that's why. And when he left home two months ago, without telling her, she was very angry, and though Señor Julián (who keeps the wineshop at the corner) told her that he had gone off to France to learn flying . . . no, she wouldn't believe it! And when he wrote to her from France, asking her to forgive him, and telling her (just as it has happened) that he'd fly back, still she wouldn't believe it. No . . . she'd got it in her head (for she's as stubborn as a mule) that *that* José María López wasn't her José María López. And now she's actually seen him flying back through the air, and seen that it really is he . . . well . . . she has almost died from the fright! And that's how men get a bad name.

MARIANA. [*Offended.*] I'd never give anyone a bad name . . . least of all him.

ANDREA. Well, I'm sure you've no reason to now!

MARIANA. And even if I had, it would be nobody's business but mine.

REPORTER. One can see that you're a wonderful wife to him.

MARIANA. And that's his business . . . I should hope.

RAMÓN. Don't pay any attention . . . she's upset.

REPORTER. I believe that our famous man is a son of Madrid . . .

ANDREA. Yes, Señor, of Madrid; and of his father and me.

REPORTER. Ah! You are his mother?

ANDREA. And very proud to be.

REPORTER. Now how old is he?

ANDREA. Thirty-three . . . that's to say, he won't be until Our Lady's day in August. That's why he's called José María . . . because we didn't expect him until the first of September. Ah, one might almost say that the Blessed Virgin took a fancy to his being born on her own special day!

REPORTER. [*To* MARIANA.] Have you been married long?

MARIANA. Ten years.

[*The children come in and go up to* MARIANA.]

ANDREA. [*Interrupting.*] They were married on Our Lady's day in March . . .

REPORTER. And was that a fancy of the Blessed Virgin's too?

RAMÓN. No, Señor, it was mine. Because this girl's mother (now in glory) was called Candelas, and . . . not to flatter her . . . she was a perfect woman.

REPORTER. And I see that you have progeny?

MARIANA. Have . . . what?

RAMÓN. He means your family, child!

MARIANA. Oh! Yes, Señor, yes . . . two boys and a girl.

RAMÓN. And more to come.

MARIANA. Now . . . what do *you* know about it?

RAMÓN. Well . . . don't fly out at me.

MARIANA. Well, I should have thought this mattered about as much to your newspaper as the price of my stockings.

REPORTER. Señora, everything in the life of a famous man is of interest.

MARIANA. Oh well, of course . . . if that's so. . . .

REPORTER. Señora, did your son take an interest in mechanics from his childhood?

ANDREA. Well . . . while his father was alive he went to school but he learnt nothing, because he had far too much imagination, the teacher said.

REPORTER. And after . . . ?

ANDREA. You can guess . . . with his father gone, there wasn't much money for schooling . . . though I'd my profession . . . and if I say it as shouldn't, I was a hairdresser . . . so we got along somehow. And indeed he wanted for nothing and never should have while I could do a day's work.

RAMÓN. No, nor afterwards either, because, when this lady here was done in by her legs giving out (begging her pardon) he married my daughter who keeps this laundry, and, not to flatter her, there's no better ironing done in Madrid than there is here. Did you notice the shirt that the Minister of Education was wearing this afternoon? On that very table it got its polish!

[*A noise is heard in the street. A motor horn sounding, and cries of "Viva! Viva!"*]

MARIANA. [*Rushing to the door.*] Oh, he's here, I do believe!

ANDREA. [*Trying to get up.*] My boy! My precious boy!

[JOSÉ MARÍA *comes in, accompanied by various men neighbours. Those on the stage mingle with them; the* REPORTER *remains on the left taking notes. After a little he goes away.*]

JOSÉ MARÍA. [*Embracing his mother.*] I'm all right, Mother! [*To his wife.*] Mariana! What did you run away for? Why didn't you wait for me?

MARIANA. [*Timidly.*] Whatever should I be doing among all those celebrities . . . and ladies . . . and gentlemen?

JOSÉ MARÍA. [*With condescending affection.*] Get along with you! You're the queen of the world for me . . . don't you know that?

MARIANA. [*With emotion.*] Oh, José María! . . .

JOSÉ MARÍA. Give us a kiss, woman! Don't be shy about it. We were married in Church, they all know that. [*Kissing her.*] Look at her . . . blushes like a girl . . . after ten years of it . . . and three babies . . . !

MARIANA. [*All blushes and tenderness.*] Silly!

JOSÉ MARÍA. [*Laughing.*] Well, here's a husband dropped from the moon for you. I tell you it's cold up there!

RAMÓN. [*Explaining.*] As one rises the temperature falls.

JOSÉ MARÍA. Well . . . youngsters! Are you scared at me . . . because I look so fine? [*Picking up the baby and kissing it.*] Look at the little chap! Why, he's got the aviator's face on him already. [*His mother, his wife, and the neighbours laugh at his jokes. To the workwomen.*] Hello, girls, you're all just as ugly as ever, I see! [*To* MARIANA.] But what's happened, woman? Isn't there going to be a glass of something . . . to drink the healths of our friends here? Have you gone bankrupt since I went away? Gentlemen! You see what happens! . . . a man shouldn't take to flying . . . that's evident!

MARIANA. [*To* CARMEN.] Run and buy some bottles of beer . . .

JOSÉ MARÍA. Beer! Women are stingy creatures! You get some rum from La Negrita and some anisette . . . and two packets of the best cigars they've got.

RAMÓN. Ah, I rather think I'll go for the cigars; women know nothing about them.

JOSÉ MARÍA. [*To Mariana.*] Here . . . don't look so scared, my girl . . . it's all right. I've got the money to pay for it. You're not walking in your sleep, are you?

RAMÓN. Why, Mariana . . . you're regularly dazed.

JOSÉ MARÍA. Oh well, oh well . . . it's not to be wondered at. This sort of thing doesn't happen every day . . . [*Going up to her.*] Come now . . . would you like me to give you a present? What's it to be? The

best Chinese shawl in Madrid? Or a necklace of those imitation diamonds? Or will you go in a 40–60 Hispano-Suiza, and have supper at the Puerta de Hierro?

MARIANA. No, I just want you to love me.

JOSÉ MARÍA. Oh I say, I say . . . that's something new! Now however d'you suppose I'm to manage to do that!

[CARMEN *enters with the bottles and puts them down on the table.*]

CARMEN. Here's the rum.

JOSÉ MARÍA. Pour it out.

[RAMÓN *arrives with the cigars.*]

RAMÓN. And the cigars. [*Then quietly to* JOSÉ MARÍA.] They're the best. But this isn't a time for doing things by halves. [*He begins to pass round the cigars.*]

JOSÉ MARÍA. Quite right . . . quite right! Now, Gentlemen. [*He takes one of the filled glasses in his hand.*] Your health!

SEVERAL VOICES. [*The others drinking.*] And yours!

SEÑOR JULIÁN. Madrid's greatest aviator!

ALL. Viva!

JOSÉ MARÍA. Thank you . . . thank you . . . thank you all!

SEVERAL VOICES. A speech! A speech!

JOSÉ MARÍA. Oh, I can't make speeches . . .

RAMÓN. [*Very solemnly.*] My boy, you must say a few words.

JOSÉ MARÍA. Well . . . if you like . . . Ahem!

SEVERAL VOICES. Hear, hear . . . silence . . . quiet them!

JOSÉ MARÍA. Ladies and gentlemen . . .

A VOICE. [*As if he had been inspired.*] Hear, hear! Very good!

JOSÉ MARÍA. I am very grateful to you . . . for this display . . . of enthusiasm.

SEVERAL VOICES. Hear, hear! Hear, hear!

JOSÉ MARÍA. Appropriate indeed to the occasion . . . though it sounds wrong for me to be the one to say it . . .

VOICES. No! No!

JOSÉ MARÍA. Well, then . . . thank you again! But, Ladies and Gentlemen . . . and because this business of conquering the air is the last word of modern science . . .

RAMÓN. That's true . . . that's very true.

JOSÉ MARÍA. And I don't care who says it isn't!

RAMÓN. Right! Hear, hear!

JOSÉ MARÍA. For whoever says it isn't . . . well, never mind him. But I am *very glad* to have given one proud day to my native place . . . and that's Madrid. And, what's more, to the Calle de le Madera, which had the honour of having me born in it. . . .

VOICES. Bravo!

JOSÉ MARÍA. Me . . . my children . . . and the mother of my children! [*Explosion of "bravo" and applause.*] Therefore . . . ladies and gentlemen, long live the Calle de la Madera, and long live Madrid and may it never be beaten at flying. And whoever don't like that can lump it!

VOICES. Very good! Very good!

SEÑOR JULIÁN. Very good indeed!

ANDREA. That boy's an orator!

RAMÓN. That's what science and democracy can do for a man!

JOSÉ MARÍA. Have another glass?

SEÑOR JULIÁN. Thank you, I will. [*To the others.*] We'd better be getting off . . . they'd like to be left by themselves a bit. [*Going up to shake hands with* JOSÉ MARÍA.] Well . . . once more. . . .

JOSÉ MARÍA. Thank you . . . thank you!

SOMEONE. Congratulations.

ANOTHER. Good-bye.

ANOTHER. Till next time. . . .

JOSÉ MARÍA. [*Importantly.*] Tomorrow, you know, I go up from the Aerodrome,

SEÑOR JULIÁN. Oh, I shan't fail to be there.

[*All the company go out.*]

ANDREA. Come and let's have a look at you, my dear! How handsome you are in that uniform!

JOSÉ MARÍA. [*Peacocking up and down.*] Well . . . it's not one of the most becoming.

MARIANA. But you must be just tired out. Don't you want a change . . . or a brush?

RAMÓN. Oho, there wasn't much mud on the road he came by, my child! [*And he laughs at his own joke.*]

JOSÉ MARÍA. No . . . good . . . no indeed, there wasn't much mud on that road! But I must change all the same, because they'll be here for me in a minute.

MARIANA. Here for you . . . Who?

JOSÉ MARÍA. Some gentlemen that are giving me a dinner.

MARIANA. [*Disconsolately.*] Tonight?

JOSÉ MARÍA. Yes, tonight.

MARIANA. You're not going to have supper at home?

JOSÉ MARÍA. But it's a dinner in my honour . . . it's been got up by the Aero Club.

RAMÓN. That's what popularity means, my child.

MARIANA. [*Sighing.*] Oh, very well then . . . you'd better hurry and get dressed.

[*So* JOSÉ MARÍA *goes off to do so. The scene which follows must be very lively.* MARIANA *keeps on taking garments from the wardrobe, and giving them to her father and the children, who go rapidly in and out. A laundress cleans the shoes.* ANDREA *puts the studs and link in the shirt, aided by the other laundresses.*]

MARIANA. Here you [*To the little boy.*] get some warm water! . . . Now, where did I put the key of the cupboard? [*She finds it in one of her pockets, opens it and takes out a cake of soap.*] Here's the scented soap. [*To the little girl.*] There, you can take it to him. [*Turning round.*] And where's his shirt . . . with the em-

broidery? [*Discarding one for another.*] No, not this one . . . this with the pleats . . . it's more the fashion now to have pleats. [*Taking out a towel.*] Here . . . take him this towel. [*She gives it to the little boy who is back from fetching the water.*] And he'll find the Eau de Cologne is on the dressing-table.

ANDREA. Give me the shirt. I can be putting in the studs.

MARIANA. Here. [*Then she goes back to the cupboard.*] His black suit. . . . [*She takes it out. Then she sneezes.*] Achiss!

ANDREA. Have you taken cold?

MARIANA. It's the pepper . . . for the . . . m . . . m . . . moths . . . [*Giving the suit to her father.*] You take it to him. [*He sneezes too.*]

RAMÓN. Achiss! [*He goes out with the suit and immediately returns.*]

MARIANA. And his patent leather shoes. [*To one of the laundresses.*] Take a cloth and clean off the dust.

PEPITO. [*Coming in.*] He wants his shirt!

ANDREA. All ready! Take it, child.

MARIANA. [*At the wardrobe with the cravats in her hands.*] Now which tie will be best . . . the blue or the red?

RAMÓN. White is what's fashionable in the evening.

MARIANA. With evening-clothes.

RAMÓN. Yes . . . that's so. Well, give him the red one . . . it's more democratic.

[PEPITO *comes back having delivered the shirt, and* NATI *goes off with the red tie.*]

MARIANA. But suppose they're all Dukes and Marquises that are giving him the dinner.

RAMÓN. So much the better! A chance to show his colours.

MARIANA. Now, let's see! . . . A handkerchief.

[*She takes one out.* JOSÉ MARÍA *comes in. He has changed but is still in his shirt-sleeves.*]

JOSÉ MARÍA. I say . . . button this for me. You starch things as stiff as a board here.

RAMÓN. You must look a credit to the laundry now!

MARIANA. I can manage it with a hairpin. That's it! Now . . . how'll you have your tie . . . a bow, or a knot?

[JOSÉ MARÍA *sits down to put on his patent leather shoes, and while he does so his wife inspects the way his hair is brushed.*]

JOSÉ MARÍA. Whichever you like.

MARIANA. Your parting's crooked. [*To one of the children.*] Bring me his coat. [*She helps him on with it.*]

JOSÉ MARÍA. Yes . . . I never can see a thing in there.

MARIANA. Now, a brush.

RAMÓN. Where's his hat?

MARIANA. [*To* THE APPRENTICE.] Brush that carefully now! [*To* JOSÉ MARÍA.] And your handkerchief . . . a bit stuck out. So! And keep this in your pocket in case you want one to use.

RAMÓN. Fold it tight, and then it won't show.

MARIANA. No, no . . . it's fashionable to have it rumpled. [*Sniffing at it.*] It hasn't got much scent on it!

ANDREA. [*To* LOLA.] Here . . . you . . . go fetch the Eau de Cologne.

MARIANA. No, wait now! I've got a bottle of scent that's never been opened. I won it in a raffle. We'll have that. [*She gets it from the wardrobe.*]

THE APPRENTICE. Here's the hat.

[JOSÉ MARÍA *puts on his hat.*]

CARMEN. Put a little scent on your moustache as well . . . so that you can smell it while you're in the motor car.

ANDREA. Some on your hair, too.

MARIANA. There now! Look at yourself in the glass. Turn round.

JOSÉ MARÍA [*Walks proudly about.*] Well . . . what do you say to it . . . eh?

MARIANA. [*With emotion.*] Isn't he handsome!

ANDREA. The very image of his father. Oh, but you're a lucky girl, my dear!

JOSÉ MARÍA. [*To the laundresses, who are looking at him.*] Yes . . . look as hard as you like . . . there aren't many to touch me!

LOLA. Oh indeed . . . you should see my young man!

RAMÓN. You should have seen me when I was your age!

JOSÉ MARÍA. I don't believe you! Well, good-bye, all!

ANDREA. Good-bye, my boy. Have a fine time!

CARMEN. Mind you enjoy yourself!

MARIANA. Don't forget me, José María!

JOSÉ MARÍA. Look here, you know . . . just because I'm going out, you mustn't miss your treat. Give yourselves a supper, with something tasty to it. Have a steak in from the café . . . and some prawns . . . and one of those custard puddings . . . have anything they've got. And ask the girls to stop, if you like. They deserve it.

ANDREA. What a good heart he has!

[*The sound of a band is heard outside.*]

MARIANA. Oh . . . the band! They've come to play to you. And just as you're going!

JOSÉ MARÍA. Never mind! Have 'em in. Come in, Señor Julián. What's all this about?

[SEÑOR JULIÁN *comes in, followed by the band and a number of neighbours . . . men and women. The laundresses move about placing the tables and chairs against the wall, except one on the left.*]

SEÑOR JULIÁN. Oh nothing . . . nothing much. But we've come, neighbours and friends, you know, to congratulate you. And we've brought the band to make it livelier, and so that the young people can dance. But they tell me that you're off . . . that you've been asked to the Palace. . . .

JOSÉ MARÍA. [*Without attempting to undeceive them about the Palace.*] What does that matter? Come in,

all of you. Yes, I've got to go, but the family's all here. Go on and enjoy yourselves. Mariana will look after you, won't you, my dear?

[*The horn of a motor car sounds in the street.*]

ANDREA. There's a motor car!

CARMEN. It's stopping at the door.

JOSÉ MARÍA. Ah . . . that's for me. [*To his father-in-law.*] Go out and say I'll be there directly. Well . . . good-bye, all.

ANDREA. Good-bye, my boy!

JOSÉ MARÍA. Good-night. Dance all you want to . . . Have a good time.

ALL. Viva! Viva! Viva!

[*He goes out . . . they all see him off from the door.*]

MARIANA. He's gone!

[*She sits down in a corner with the baby in her arms, and the other two children in front of her.*]

SEÑOR JULIÁN. Come along now. Start up the band!

RAMÓN. Come along, child. Take a turn with me.

MARIANA. No, thank you. I don't feel like it.

RAMÓN. Why, what's the matter, with you? Aren't you proud of your husband being the hero of the day?

MARIANA. Yes, of course, but . . . well, you see . . . it's just because he is . . . that I've got to do without him.

RAMÓN. Get along with you, woman . . . and don't be a goose. That's what it means to be married to a famous man!

[*The band begins a two-step, and everyone begins to dance. They dance it like a schottische. But* MARIANA *rather sadly caresses her children.*]

CURTAIN.

ACT II

Scene I.

A very modest dining-room in José María's *house. At the back there is a door communicating with the ironing-room which was the scene of the First Act.*

Right and left there are doors to inner rooms. José María *is seated at the table before a dish of codfish stew.* Mariana *and his mother are waiting on him.*

During the scene Ramón *comes and goes from the ironing-room, smoking a cigar, in high good humour.*

Mariana. [*With solicitude.*] But you're not eating. Don't you feel hungry?

Andrea. Aren't you well?

José María. [*Loftily.*] The fact is, you know, that this sort of food makes me sick! [*With disdain.*] Codfish stew!

Mariana. But it used to be your favourite dish!

José María. [*Still loftily.*] Used to be isn't is, is it?

Mariana. But . . . good heavens . . . !

Andrea. Have some salad then. Lettuce and olives. . . .

José María. [*Getting up.*] No . . . thanks.

Mariana. [*Irritated.*] That doesn't do either, doesn't it! You haven't made much of a meal, have you? Well . . . you know best. And the less you weigh, I suppose the better you can fly.

José María. This is a nice way of looking after a man, isn't it?

Mariana. Well, it's the same I've always had, and you've never complained till now.

ANDREA. But, my darling boy, why aren't you eating anything?

MARIANA. Because codfish stew isn't good enough for him . . . that's why! [*To* SEÑORA ANDREA.] Well, you can clear away then. [*To* JOSÉ MARÍA.] Next time you'd better write out a menu on a piece of paper beforehand, then we can send it from a restaurant.

[SEÑORA ANDREA *hobbles out sighing and carrying some dishes.*]

JOSÉ MARÍA. Are you trying to start a row, or what is the matter with you?

MARIANA. Nothing's the matter with me.

JOSÉ MARÍA. Well, try and be a little better tempered.

[*He goes out.*]

MARIANA. Thank you . . . the same to you.

RAMÓN. Woman, woman . . . do remember who you're talking to!

MARIANA. [*Ill-humoured.*] I'm talking to my husband, I believe.

RAMÓN. But now he's such a famous man. . . .

MARIANA. Oh, no doubt he is to everyone else . . . but as far as I'm concerned, he's my husband . . . and that's all about it.

RAMÓN. All right . . . all right! Don't get excited! I can't help it, can I?

[*He turns to go out.*]

MARIANA. [*Angrily.*] That's right . . . off with you . . . run away from anything unpleasant. [*Desperately, half to herself.*] Holy Mother . . . it's a lonely world!

RAMÓN. [*Returning.*] Now, now . . . what's the matter?

MARIANA. [*Pointing to the plate left on the table.*] What's the matter? Oh, nothing! That's nothing, I suppose!

RAMÓN. Well, there's no need to get in such a state just because a man's lost his taste for codfish!

MARIANA. [*Nearly crying.*] It's not the codfish, it's not the codfish, it's everything that's put before him! First the house is small, and then the wine is bad . . . and the soap isn't scented . . . even the sheets on the bed are too coarse . . . [*With hurt pride.*] The sheets! We've slept in them well enough for these ten years, haven't we?

RAMÓN. Oh, nonsense, nonsense, child.

MARIANA. And my hands are coarse too, aren't they? Well, as I've been slaving ten years at an ironing board to support him . . . may the Blessed Virgin forgive me! Our bed common, indeed! You see how we'll all end if what I think is true! . . . . You'll see!

RAMÓN. If what you think is . . . ? What *do* you think, then . . . Have you found out anything?

MARIANA. [*With concentrated wrath.*] If I'd found out anything d'you think I'd be sitting here quietly?

RAMÓN. Quietly! Did you say quietly?

MARIANA. And if I want to make a noise I will!

RAMÓN. No doubt . . . till you've driven *me* out of the house to escape hearing you . . .

MARIANA. [*Without looking at him, finishing clearing the table.*] Perhaps you'll find another one as cheap to live in . . . I'd try.

RAMÓN. [*Taking no offence.*] Well . . . I'm off now anyway. When you've come to your senses just let me know.

MARIANA. And God go with you!

[SEÑOR RAMÓN *goes out. As soon as she is alone,* MARIANA *takes an illustrated periodical out of a drawer and, sitting down at the table, turns over the leaves. Leaning on her elbows as she looks, attentively, at the photographs.*]

MARIANA. [*Reading.*] "The Aerodrome of Guidad Lineal. The famous Madrid aviator, José María López, surrounded by his friends and admirers. A group of ladies and gentlemen congratulating the aviator." [*With contempt and anger.*] *Ladies* indeed!

[JOSÉ MARÍA *comes in and stands looking at the paper over her shoulder.*]

JOSÉ MARÍA. What are you looking at?

MARIANA. [*Without looking around.*] I'm looking to see how indecently fashionable ladies dress themselves nowadays.

JOSÉ MARÍA. A bit saucy, aren't they? Necks for sale back and front . . . and one leg going cheap!

MARIANA. [*Still angry and contemptuous.*] Disgusting! How some of them have the impudence! ! Look at that one!

JOSÉ MARÍA. [*Elaborately ignorant.*] Which one?

MARIANA. That one on the right . . . that's glued herself close to you . . .

JOSÉ MARÍA. [*Who dissimulates very badly.*] Oh . . . with the small hat?

MARIANA. No . . . with the large hat!

JOSÉ MARÍA. [*With extreme indifference.*] Oh . . . yes . . . !

MARIANA. [*Looking at him slyly.*] Handsome . . . isn't she?

JOSÉ MARÍA. Showy . . . I shouldn't call her handsome!

MARIANA. [*Getting up.*] What's her name?

JOSÉ MARÍA. How can I tell? I don't know her.

MARIANA. Don't you? Well . . . I do!

JOSÉ MARÍA. What d'you mean . . . ?

MARIANA. She's the one that you go about with a photograph of in your pocket-book. . . .

JOSÉ MARÍA. Oh . . . I've got a photograph of her in my pocket-book, have I?

MARIANA. Well, you haven't . . . because I took it out this morning. And here it is! [*She takes the picture from her pocket and throws it on the table.*] There you are . . . the very same . . . except that she's managed to undress herself even a bit more in the photograph. [*Empha-*

sizing her words.] Well, now, do you know her . . . or not?

JOSÉ MARÍA. [*Stammering a little.*] Know her? . . . yes, certainly I know her . . .

MARIANA. [*Ironically.*] By sight . . . I suppose? Well?

JOSÉ MARÍA. [*Asserting himself like a man.*] Well . . . I'm not called on to give an account of myself to you or to anyone . . . and you may think what you damned well please!

MARIANA. May I?

JOSÉ MARÍA. [*Wanting to get out of the difficulty by putting her in the wrong.*] And if it comes to that, I'd like to know what the devil you mean by searching my pocketbook!

MARIANA. If I smell burning I go through the house to see what's on fire, don't I? Do you suppose . . . suspecting what I do . . . that I'm going to sit still with my hands folded. Just you wait, my friend.

JOSÉ MARÍA. And might I ask what you suspect?

MARIANA. I suspect that it was in that lady's house that you learned to tell whether the sheets were coarse or not. So there!

JOSÉ MARÍA. [*Taking a high stand.*] Oh dear me . . . jealous, are we! The same old tale!

MARIANA. "The same old tale." I like your conceit. And when have I ever been jealous, I'd like to know?

JOSÉ MARÍA. Once a month for the last five years.

MARIANA. Once a week for the last ten years . . . if you could have had your wish . . . but you never got further than wishing for all your efforts!

JOSÉ MARÍA. [*Wounded in his pride as a lady-killer.*] Oh indeed . . . Oh, I like that! You don't know what you are talking about . . . you don't seem to know the sort of man I am!

MARIANA. I know you better than I know my two

babies. And I know this, conceited as you are . . . that if there was nothing in it this time, as there never has been before . . . then you'd be pretending there was . . . as you always have. When you keep quiet there's something wrong.

JOSÉ MARÍA. But what on earth do you expect, I should like to know? When a fellow's the hero of the day, and there's a something about him besides . . . though I say it that shouldn't . . . ! Well, when women take a fancy for a man . . . and especially these ladies from the theatre . . . why he looks a perfect fool if he turns his back at the least little attention. Never mind whether he wants it to go further or not . . . he can't snub her or give her a box on the ears, can he, as a woman can a man . . . as cool as you please.

MARIANA. [*Ironically.*] Go on! Anything else?

JOSÉ MARÍA. Nothing else! This lady (who is a quite celebrated singer, if you want to know) was kind enough to present me with her photograph. Now I couldn't throw it away, could I? And you've seen for yourself the effort I made to hide it. Why . . . d'you suppose I thought for a moment that you'd think . . . ? And nothing more has happened. Oh, . . . don't you know what you are to me? And the mother of my children as well. How could I deceive you? Never . . . never in this world. Do you want me to swear it.

MARIANA. [*Half won over all the same.*] I want you to stop talking humbug. As you always lie like a newspaper it doesn't matter much what sort of tale you tell, for no one's going to believe you. But . . . just you look out. Your luck's in for the minute, isn't it . . . and you think you're no end of a fellow, just because a few pesetas have fallen on you out of the sky. Make the most of them while they last. But I'm used to earning what I need for myself and my children. It's little enough and it's hard to come by . . . but it makes me a queen in this kingdom anyhow. My kingdom's my home. And don't

forget this. There's never been any man let come in it but you . . . I love you a long sight more than you deserve to be loved. But let's have this clear . . . there aren't going to be any women in the case but me either. And if you're not agreeable to that . . . well, there's lots of room in the world for us both, and it's as easy to take the train as to buzz through the air. Off you go then . . . and we'll meet again on Judgment Day.

JOSÉ MARÍA. [*Coaxingly.*] And leave you behind me?

MARIANA. [*Tenderly.*] That wouldn't worry you!

JOSÉ MARÍA. [*Kissing her.*] Come here . . . you dragon . . . you little wretch . . . ugly little devil that you are! Who loves you . . . eh . . . eh . . . eh?

[*The two smile, in each other's arms.* RAMÓN *enters and sees them.*]

RAMÓN. Ah, God be praised! Then everything's all right again! The devil's not so black as he's painted, is he? [*To* MARIANA, *who has broken away from her husband.*] So we do love him just a little! He gets his ration of kisses . . . does he?

MARIANA. [*Masking her confusion in asperity.*] Oh . . . let me be!

[*And she flings out, blushing furiously.*]

JOSÉ MARÍA. [*Watching her go, with pride and satisfaction.*] Blushing like a girl . . . such a simple soul!

RAMÓN. [*Confidentially.*] No doubt . . . but I'd sooner not be in her black books for all that. Look out for yourself, if she ever does lose her temper.

JOSÉ MARÍA. Oh, don't worry! I know how to manage women, I should hope!

[*A motor car is heard in the street.*]

RAMÓN. A motor car . . . stopping here.

JOSÉ MARÍA. Someone from the Club, I daresay . . . coming to take me to the Aerodrome. It's just about time . . .

[JULIETA'S *voice is heard outside.*]

JULIETA. Señor José María López?

JOSÉ MARÍA. [*With terror, recognising the voice.*] Who's that?

JULIETA [*Appearing at the door.*] May I come in?

[SEÑOR RAMÓN *politely rushes forward to receive her.*]

JOSÉ MARÍA. Good Lord . . . to think of her turning up here!

RAMÓN. [*As sweet as honey.*] Come in, Señora, come in!

JULIETA. [*Who hasn't seen* JOSÉ MARÍA *yet.*] Is Señor José . . . ? [*Seeing him.*] Ah . . . good afternoon!

JOSÉ MARÍA. [*Disconcerted.*] Good afternoon!

JULIETA. Oh, don't be vexed with me . . . because I've come to fetch you. Yes, my car's outside. We can be at the Aerodrome in ten minutes. Will the weather be right for flying today?

[*There is a little most expressive by-play.* RAMÓN *is greatly struck by the lady, and quite alive to the situation.* JOSÉ MARÍA *doesn't know what on earth he's about.* JULIETA *alone commands the situation.*]

JOSÉ MARÍA. Oh yes, Señora, certainly . . . the weather's magnificent.

JULIETA. I warn you . . . I'm very nervous . . .

JOSÉ MARÍA. Not more than I am . . . no, I assure you . . . but as you say, the weather . . . oh yes, magnificent! [*He is looking very uneasily at the door by which his wife left the room.*] Señor Ramón, will you be good enough to see if the passage door is shut? . . . because . . . because there's a draught.

RAMÓN. [*With a smile of complicity.*] Certainly, my dear boy, certainly . . . I'll see to it. [*Then to himself as he goes.*] Now the cat's coming out of the bag! That girl of mine . . . she has a sharp eye . . . !

[*He goes out, shutting the door.*]

JOSÉ MARÍA. [*Who, not knowing what to do or say,*

gets out of the difficulty as best he can.] So . . . you've come to fetch me?

JULIETA. [*With coquetry.*] Yes, Señor . . . if the wind will be kind enough to let us fly away together!

JOSÉ MARÍA. [*Wishing to go.*] Well . . . let's be off then . . . the sooner the better . . .

JULIETA. [*Who is in no hurry, and is looking, curiously around the room.*] Is this where you live?

JOSÉ MARÍA. Yes, Señora . . . for a few days. I am . . . so to speak . . . staying as a sort of a guest.

JULIETA. Ah! You don't live with your family?

JOSÉ MARÍA. Oh certainly . . . I live with my family. But . . . well, you see, this little place is only a sort of a workshop. It did well enough before . . . but now . . . [*He is giving himself airs.*]

JULIETA. [*Romantically.*] Only a workshop! My father's home was his workshop!

[*She, with quite a coming on disposition, gets nearer to him as she talks, while he, who is half dead with fright lest his wife should appear, tries to edge away from her without seeming to do so.*]

JULIETA. Yes . . . I come from the people, just as you do. I've gone hungry to bed, often and often . . . just as you have.

JOSÉ MARÍA. [*A little annoyed.*] I never went hungry to bed in my life!

JULIETA. Well, never mind how hungry! But as long as you've been poor and down-trodden . . . as long as you've known what it is to hate the people that have got everything and despise you for having got nothing at all. . . . That's why I took to you so, I do believe. For we know what it is, don't we, to have people cringing to us . . . in the old days they wouldn't even have known we were there. And now *we* can do something, can't we . . . we've got inferiors too. Birth and breeding . . . there's nothing in it. I've scrubbed a Marquis's floors, I have . . .

but my hands are soft enough, aren't they? And I tell you if a Duke wanted to kiss me, I'd have him down on his knees to ask.

[JOSÉ MARÍA *doesn't know how to reply to this discourse, and even if he had known he wouldn't be able to do so, because the voice of his wife can be heard, disputing with* SEÑOR RAMÓN, *while she is trying to open the door.*]

RAMÓN. [*Outside.*] But I tell you you can't . . . he's talking to some gentlemen . . .

MARIANA. And I tell you I will if I want to . . . so there!

JOSÉ MARÍA. [*Crossing himself as if he heard thunder.*] Blessed Saint Barbara! . . . My wife!

JULIETA. Who is making that dreadful noise?

JOSÉ MARÍA. Oh, I'm sure I don't know . . . it's nothing. We'd better start.

[*He tries to make her leave.*]

JULIETA. No, wait . . . they're having a great row about something.

JOSÉ MARÍA. We shall be late . . .

RAMÓN. [*Outside.*] I say you shan't go in. . . .

MARIANA. I say I will . . . and nothing's going to stop me! [*The door bursts open violently.*] Can't walk about my own house, can't I . . . well, that is the last straw! [*She comes in and sees* JULIETA.] Aha! . . . well, now you see! . . . And didn't I feel it in my bones . . . ?

[*She goes towards* JULIETA, *who looks at her with a little alarm.*]

RAMÓN. [*To* JOSÉ MARÍA.] And couldn't you have taken yourself off, you prize fool!

MARIANA. Good afternoon, Señora. [*Looking her up and down.*] Charmed to meet you! [*Turning to* JOSÉ MARÍA.] Well now . . . what about it? Who's this lady? Some actress . . . or what? You've got pretty cool cheek, haven't you . . . the pair of you!

JULIETA. [*Loftily.*] Señora!

RAMÓN. Now, my dear child . . . take care!

MARIANA. And what have *I* to take care about?

JOSÉ MARÍA. This lady has come . . .

MARIANA. This lady has come . . . to the wrong shop . . . as she'll find out now!

JOSÉ MARÍA. Mariana! . . .

MARIANA. Let me alone! [*To* JULIETA.] You've taken a fancy to my husband . . . have you? Well . . . nothing wrong in that, of course! If only you weren't a little late . . . for ten years ago you see he took a fancy to me. . . .

JULIETA. Your husband . . . ?

MARIANA. Yes, Señora, there he is . . . as large as life!

JULIETA. [*Indignantly* . . . to JOSÉ MARÍA.] And you never told me . . . !

MARIANA. [*Interrupting her.*] Never told you he was married? Just fancy! But then he always was forgetful! But he is . . . married to me by Holy Church . . . and me with three babies . . . and another one coming . . . so now what have you to say?

JULIETA. I came to call for this gentleman. We had arranged to go flying.

JOSÉ MARÍA. That's all.

[*The two women look at each other with some disdain.*]

MARIANA. [*Ironically.*] Flying!

JULIETA. There's no harm in flying that I know of.

MARIANA. Well, he won't be flying this afternoon.

JOSÉ MARÍA. [*Feeling his importance.*] I . . . shan't be flying . . . !

MARIANA. No, Señora . . . he has rather a cold, and the draughts up there would be bad for him. So if flying's all you're after . . .

JULIETA. [*Serious.*] I'm sorry. Of course that would never do. Good afternoon.

MARIANA. [*Without moving.*] Good afternoon to you.

JOSÉ MARÍA. [*Feeling that he has been made cut a pretty poor figure.*] Julieta . . . I . . .

JULIETA. [*With a grimace of distaste.*] Oh, please don't trouble to explain!

MARIANA. You hear what she says. She's quite right. Don't!

[JOSÉ MARÍA *slinks into a corner.* JULIETA *starts to go out, but being somewhat perturbed goes toward the wrong door.*]

MARIANA. No, Señora, this way . . . [*Generously, and repenting a little.*] I'm sorry if I've hurt your feelings. But you just go away and forget all about it, won't you? For though, of course, it's worse for me, it's not very pleasant for you either . . . and I know it wasn't your fault. But that's the way with a man. He runs up the bill . . . and we have to pay it between us, don't we? But don't you worry.

[JULIETA *goes out.* RAMÓN, *very gallant, opens the door for her, and* JOSÉ MARÍA *tries to follow her, but* MARIANA *puts herself in his way, and stops him.*]

MARIANA. And where are you going?

JOSÉ MARÍA. Wherever I choose . . .

MARIANA. What . . . going after her again, are you . . . going to take her flying! Yes, a nice safe place for you both to sit laughing at me . . . where I can't get at you. Wasn't it bad enough to bring her to my very house . . . playing your tricks on me under my very nose.

JOSÉ MARÍA. [*Furious.*] I didn't bring her. I didn't know she was coming. And we weren't playing any tricks on you either. That's the truth . . . and if you don't want to believe it, so much the worse for you. But I tell you this. I'm not going to be treated like the dirt under your feet. I've a business appointment with a lady, and I'm going to keep it . . . as any man would who calls himself a man. There now . . . is that clear?

MARIANA. Well . . . I give you fair warning. . . .

JOSÉ MARÍA. Let's have it!

MARIANA. If you go out of that door, you don't come back again!

JOSÉ MARÍA. What d'you mean?

MARIANA. Not back to this house.

JOSÉ MARÍA. Who's the master here . . . I'd like to know? You or I?

MARIANA. Neither. The one that's in the right is the master.

JOSÉ MARÍA. Am I your husband . . . or not?

MARIANA. [*Turning about.*] It would be all the same to me if you were Garibaldi!

JOSÉ MARÍA. [*To his father-in-law.*] What do you think of this? Isn't it enough to make a man hit her over the head? I tell you I'm going to fly with the lady . . . I'm going to take her flying . . . and that's all!

RAMÓN. Now, my dear child, do remember that he's got to keep his engagements. The public is expecting him . . . he's a famous man!

MARIANA. A famous man, is he! She thinks so the first time she sees him flying through the air. But I've seen him do it once before . . . when the bull tossed him there . . . the last time he tried to be a famous man. I knew all about his fame, thank you . . . and just how long it lasts . . . till his first tumble!

JOSÉ MARÍA. Very well then . . . have it your own way!

MARIANA. You're going?

JOSÉ MARÍA. I'm going.

MARIANA. Listen to me now . . .

JOSÉ MARÍA. Thank you, I've heard all I want to . . . till next time.

[*He goes out, very dignified.*]

MARIANA. There won't be any next time! Yes . . . you've done it now!

[ANDREA *comes in, carrying a dish of fried ham and doesn't see that* JOSÉ MARÍA *isn't there.*]

ANDREA. Now, my dearest boy, you'll be seasick if you try to fly without eating anything first. Try these two slices of fried ham . . .

[*She looks around with amazement at not finding him.*]

MARIANA. [*Laughing bitterly.*] Ham! . . . So that's what you've been busy with! A lot of use, isn't it?

ANDREA. Why?

MARIANA. Now that your son's going to take his meals out in future . . . for ever and ever . . . amen!

[*She sits down in a corner and cries, drying her eyes with her apron.*]

SCENE II.

The same scene as in the first act. At the rising of the curtain MARIANA *and the three laundresses are seen ironing.*

MARIANA. Put everything tidy now, and be off to your dinner; it's one o'clock.

[*She takes off her white apron and sleeves and folds them up, putting them on one side. The girls do the same. The postman appears at the street-door and takes a letter out of his bag.*]

POSTMAN. [*Presenting the letter.*] José María López.

MARIANA. [*Curtly.*] It's the wrong address . . .

[*The girls look at her with amazement.*]

POSTMAN. Wrong address? [*Looking at the letter.*] 28 Madera Alta. Laundry.

MARIANA. Yes, Señor. 28 Madera Alta. Laundry. What's that got to do with it?

POSTMAN. [*A little baffled.*] But he always did live here.

MARIANA. No one lives here but me!

POSTMAN. You mean that Señor José María López has moved?

MARIANA. That's it.

POSTMAN. And can you inform me . . . ?

MARIANA. [*Turning her back on him.*] He didn't leave his address.

POSTMAN. Oh, very well. [*Making a note on the letter.*] José María López . . . wrongly addressed . . . Good afternoon. Sorry, I'm sure.

MARIANA. Good afternoon. Don't mention it! [*To the girls, who are still looking at her, astonished.*] Here . . . what are you all standing around for? Off with you . . . and be back again at a quarter to, sharp. It's Saturday and I can't have things left half-done!

[*The girls put on their shawls and go out to the street.* SEÑOR RAMÓN *appears from the family rooms. He is smoking a cigar.*]

RAMÓN. Who was that you were talking to?

MARIANA. [*Taking up the linen from the table, and folding it. She doesn't look her father in the face.*] The postman.

RAMÓN. Who was the letter for?

MARIANA. For nobody here, that's clear, as he took it away again.

RAMÓN. But . . . who was it for?

MARIANA. I think the name was José María López.

RAMÓN. [*Who can't believe his ears.*] And you didn't take it?

MARIANA. No, I didn't!

RAMÓN. Have you taken leave of your senses?

MARIANA. Perhaps!

RAMÓN. [*Putting on the manner of a tyrannical father.*] Answer me now. How long is this nonsense going to last?

MARIANA. [*As if she hadn't heard him.*] Have you all finished dinner?

RAMÓN. Did you hear what I said?

MARIANA. I asked if you'd had your dinner?

RAMÓN. [*Ill-humouredly.*] Yes . . . we've had our dinner.

MARIANA. Well then, go out and take a little walk, . . . it'll help you to digest it!

RAMÓN. [*Now really angry.*] I want to know how long you mean to keep this up?

MARIANA. Who means?

RAMÓN. You and your husband.

MARIANA. I haven't got a husband!

RAMÓN. I never saw such a pig-headed . . . !

MARIANA. Well, I didn't make myself!

RAMÓN. Look here . . . do you think that any woman born has a right to throw a man out of the house in this way?

MARIANA. He went away because he wanted to, didn't he?

RAMÓN. Well, he's been wanting to come back for a long time now.

MARIANA. He didn't hurry back that night, I noticed!

RAMÓN. What did you expect him to hurry back for? To give you a shaking . . . which is what you deserved?

MARIANA. To give *me* a shaking . . . after everything else he'd done to me! You men make me laugh!

RAMÓN. He didn't do anything to you! And even if he did . . . that's all over now. Look, I'll tell you . . . that woman went off to Paris three days ago . . .

MARIANA. Oh! so that's why he wants to come home, is it? And do you think I'm going to take anyone else's leavings! Get that out of your head. Let him spend the summer where he spent the winter!

RAMÓN. [*Philosophic.*] Now this would be all very well, you know, if you were the same sort that she is. But you are his wife . . . and that's a very different thing.

I'm not standing up for him, but what sort of a state would this world get into, if every time a man started to amuse himself a little his wife went on like this? Here you are in your own house, and no one can take that away from you. . . .

MARIANA. [*Interrupting.*] No . . . I pay the rent!

RAMÓN. [*With great dignity.*] I was not referring to that! This is your home . . . and no matter what happens you must remember that you're his wife . . . and that he's your husband . . . and above all, that he's the father of your children!

MARIANA. Yes . . . a lot of trouble that's put him to!

RAMÓN. [*Sincerely indignant.*] I don't know how I have the patience to listen to such talk! . . . The man has gone too far already . . . he has begged your pardon for something that he's never done. And I go too far when I come on such an errand. Why should I bother to make you friends again? What is it to do with me?

MARIANA. You're pretty well paid for it, aren't you?

RAMÓN. [*Dignified.*] And pray what do you mean to insinuate by that?

MARIANA. Well, I've noticed that for the last few days you've been smoking some very good cigars.

RAMÓN. [*Trying to hide the cigar which he's smoking at that moment.*] *I?*

MARIANA. And cigarettes . . . and you go to the café every afternoon . . . and have a glass of something. And every evening to the Cinema, and you've got a ticket for the bull-fight tomorrow. That'll have cost you seven pesetas. And you've got the five I gave you last Sunday besides . . . and today is Saturday. . . .

RAMÓN. And what then . . . ?

MARIANA. [*Beginning to cry.*] Oh, I wouldn't have believed you'd sell your own daughter for a packet of cigars and a bull-fight!

RAMÓN. [*Walking wrathfully up and down.*] I

wouldn't have believed that any man in the world could be such a nincompoop as to sit waiting his wife's permission to come back to his own house. If my Candelas . . . now in glory . . . had tried anything of the sort on me . . . ! However, she was always a perfect fool!

[ANDREA *appears in the door, hears the last words, and stands looking at him scornfully.*]

ANDREA. *I see!* And so yours is all the sense we've got left in the house!

RAMÓN. [*Rounding on her.*] I was not addressing my remarks to you, Señora!

ANDREA. A "perfect fool" was she? No doubt . . . beside such a very wide awake old man as you are!

[MARIANA *goes into the sitting-room, leaving them to their quarrel.*]

RAMÓN. And may I ask why you want to pick a quarrel with me?

ANDREA. I shouldn't be surprised if the answer was that what has happened here is more your fault than anyone's.

RAMÓN. My fault that your son went flying and got the little sense he ever had blown out of him!

ANDREA. If the poor boy hadn't been set a bad example by the one person who ought to have set him a good one! Yes . . . that's what I mean.

RAMÓN. Señora, I am a widower, and I am free to behave as I please.

ANDREA. I am a widow . . . but I don't know that that's a reason for not behaving myself!

RAMÓN. Señora, you are a woman, and with a woman it's very different!

ANDREA. You're quite right. It is . . . very different indeed!

[MARIANA *comes back with the baby in her arms, one child by the hand, and another clinging to her skirts.*]

MARIANA. Quarrelling as usual, are you? . . . Do drop it . . . it's nobody's business but mine. . . . [*She sits down on a low chair, and looks at the biggest child.*]

Dirty nose! Come here! [*Takes out a handkerchief and wipes it furiously.*] Blow now! Harder! . . . harder!

RAMÓN. He *can't* blow any harder, my dear!

MARIANA. That's right! Take his part against me . . . so that he'll be well brought up from the beginning! [*To the little girl, who is biting her nails.*] Very well, bite your nails, if you want to! [*Gives her a slap.*]

RAMÓN. But my good girl. . . .

MARIANA. [*Getting up.*] In this house everybody's got to sit up and behave themselves!

[SEÑOR RAMÓN *goes towards the door.*]

MARIANA. Are you going out? Take the children and leave them at the school as you go by.

[*The children take their grandfather's hands, without saying a word, looking terrified at their mother.*]

MARIANA. Tie up that shoe-lace!

[*The little boy lets go his grandfather's hand, and ties the shoe-string with trepidation.*]

RAMÓN. [*While he waits for the tying to be finished.*] All right . . . and if I happen to see . . . *him* . . . what am I to say?

MARIANA. [*To the little boy, as if she hadn't heard her father.*] Don't fidget, child!

RAMÓN. But suppose I do see the man, what *am* I to say to him!

[*He goes out with the children.* MARIANA, *with the smallest one in her arms, watches him from the door.* SEÑORA ANDREA *sighs.*]

ANDREA. Oh, Lord!

MARIANA. [*Affectionately, her harshness quite gone.*] Oh, come now . . . what's the trouble?

ANDREA. What should be?

MARIANA. Of course you take his part.

ANDREA. Ah, I'm too old now, my dear, to take anybody's part.

MARIANA. D'you think I'm a beast?

ANDREA. No. He's my son . . . and I'm fond of him

. . . that's only natural. But you're a woman . . . and I've been a woman too, and I've known what it was to go through what you're going through . . . that's all.

MARIANA. [*To hide her feelings.*] Would you like to have me do your hair for you?

ANDREA. [*Hiding hers too.*] Much you know about hair-dressing! Anyway you're in no state for it now! Let it go till another day . . . [*She's on the point of going into the inner room, but stops on the threshold.*] You haven't had any dinner . . . don't you want me to make you a cup of chocolate?

MARIANA. I'm not hungry. Make some soup for the baby, he hasn't had anything.

ANDREA. Well . . . it'll all be as God wills! . . .

[*She sighs and goes out.*]

MARIANA. [*Looking around with the child in her arms.*] The house does seem so empty! [*Sits down on the low chair; a street-organ begins to play outside.*] A street-organ now! [*Sighs and looks at the child almost with tears in her eyes.*] You've got your father's face! [*Kisses him passionately.*] Little angel! [*A pause.*] And to think that if God spares you to me you'll grow up to be a man . . . and as great a villain as any of them! [*She kisses him again, tenderly, as if to beg his forgiveness for her evil thought.*] Oh . . . if I could only keep you as you are . . . even if I had to bottle you!

[SEÑOR JULIÁN *appears at the door. The organ goes on playing for a moment still.*]

SEÑOR JULIÁN. [*Insinuatingly.*] Alone as usual, neighbour!

MARIANA. [*Raising her eyes, and still smiling at the child.*] Alone with my worries!

SEÑOR JULIÁN. [*Approaching and making a grimace at the child.*] I say! How fat the little rascal's getting!

MARIANA. [*With the pride of a mother.*] Isn't he?

SEÑOR JULIÁN. [*Enthusiastically.*] Whatever you put your hand to you do well!

MARIANA. [*A little dryly.*] Oh, sometimes well, and sometimes badly.

SEÑOR JULIÁN. [*Sighing.*] Some men have luck!

MARIANA. Do they?

SEÑOR JULIÁN. [*Insinuatingly.*] And mostly don't value it when they have it, worse luck!

MARIANA. Worse luck for them!

SEÑOR JULIÁN. Do you want to know why I never married?

MARIANA. No . . . why should I?

SEÑOR JULIÁN. Not out of curiosity?

MARIANA. [*Despondently.*] Thank you! I know all I want to know about this wretched world!

SEÑOR JULIÁN. [*A little impudently.*] You've had lessons from your husband, haven't you?

MARIANA. [*Head high.*] And who else should I get them from?

SEÑOR JULIÁN. [*Approaching again.*] Well . . . you've had a very poor teacher!

MARIANA. [*Angrily.*] Now you be careful!

SEÑOR JULIÁN. There . . . there . . . I didn't mean anything. [*Smiling.*] God bless me! . . . how you do fly out!

MARIANA. Then you'd better keep clear of me, hadn't you?

SEÑOR JULIÁN. All I did mean was . . . what a shame that a woman like you shouldn't be better appreciated. Why, any man ought to be on his knees to you. . . .

MARIANA. That's for me to say!

SEÑOR JULIÁN. [*Not disconcerted.*] What . . . with a face like yours, and a figure like yours, and those eyes and that hair, not to mention that you're the best housekeeper in all the quarter . . . and to think that you spend your life slaving to support a man who's not worth a snap of your fingers!

MARIANA. [*Wrathfully.*] Will you be quiet!

SEÑOR JULIÁN. [*More and more agitated.*] And if

ever he does earn a few pesetas, off he goes to spend them, with whoever. . . .

MARIANA. [*Trying not to cry.*] Well, they're his own, aren't they? He has nobody's leave to ask.

SEÑOR JULIÁN. [*Very close.*] But do you know who it is that's been helping him spend them lately?

MARIANA. [*Beside herself with suffering jealousy and anger.*] Get out of my sight!

SEÑOR JULIÁN. Now don't be angry . . . I tell you these things because I . . . I care for you . . . Yes, indeed! More than you think.

MARIANA. Care for *me* . . . you!

SEÑOR JULIÁN. And that's why I'm so sorry, Señora . . . terribly, terribly sorry, to see you caring so much for a man who is as unworthy of you. . . .

MARIANA. [*Greatly excited.*] Oh ho . . . unworthy is he! But you're not, I dare say. For all you do is to take advantage of being his friend and come like this when you think there's no one else in the house to protect me . . . ! But there is! This child in my arms, and two others, and another yet, please God. And the man's not born that could make me forget the joy of the pain of bringing them into the world to be . . . to be their father's children! So now!

SEÑOR JULIÁN. [*Hiding his chagrin with a slight laugh.*] Well, don't scratch my eyes out, just because I can't help being in love with you. . . .

[*Voices and steps are heard in the street.*]

MARIANA. What's that? What has happened?

[*She dashes towards the door at the same time that* SEÑOR RAMÓN *and another man enter supporting* JOSÉ MARÍA, *who has his head bandaged.*]

MARIANA. José María . . . an accident!

[*She leaves the baby in the arms of the* APPRENTICE *who has come in with the other two work-women and some neighbours, and throws herself upon her husband.*]

RAMÓN. [*Consequently.*] Carefully . . . this way now! All right, don't be frightened!

MARIANA. This is what comes of flying! I might have known!

ANDREA. [*Appearing in the door.*] Oh . . . my precious boy! . . . Is he hurt?

RAMÓN. [*Trying to keep* MARIANA *away from* JOSÉ MARÍA, *who has fallen, as if fainting, in a chair.*] Keep calm, child, keep calm . . . !

MARIANA. Let me alone!

[*They all move a little aside, and she goes up to her husband.*]

MARIANA. What is it? What happened?

ANDREA. But isn't anybody going for the doctor?

JOSÉ MARÍA. [*In a dying voice.*] Can you forgive me?

MARIANA. Oh, yes, my darling, yes! . . . But what happened? . . . Where are you hurt?

[*She tries to take off the bandage.*]

JOSÉ MARIA. [*Resisting.*] No! . . . No!

MARIANA. Yes! . . . Yes! . . . I must see. . . . [*She begins, feverishly, to take off the bandage.*] There's no blood! [*She finishes taking off the bandage, and sees that there is nothing wrong at all.*] There's nothing wrong at all! Oh . . . you miserable fraud!

ANDREA. He isn't hurt? . . . Praise be to God!

MARIANA. How dare you come here and give me such a fright?

JOSÉ MARÍA. [*Going up to her and taking her in his arms.*] How else was I to get into the house? I had to do something.

MARIANA. [*Wishing to appear implacable.*] Let me alone!

JOSÉ MARÍA. Do you want me to go off again? Well . . . I've kept the cab waiting. Look! Shall I go, or shall I stay? . . . Come now . . . which is it to be?

MARIANA. Well, if you do stay, you're going to belong

to me . . . and I don't go shares with anyone. So I warn you.

JOSÉ MARÍA. Get along with you! . . . I'm much too much of a man for one woman to get in her pocket. [*She makes a half angry gesture.*] Why . . . one woman would bore me to death! But you're about six women rolled into one . . . !

MARIANA. [*Lovingly.*] You're a funny fellow, aren't you?

JOSÉ MARÍA. Am I? . . . Well . . . as long as I can make *you* laugh . . . !

[*He kisses her.*]

MARIANA. [*Accepting the kiss.*] Oh, anyone can take me in!

JOSÉ MARÍA. I like that! Here's a famous man for you to order about . . . and still you're not satisfied! What more do you want, pray?

MARIANA. Oh dear me! If you're not to be trusted when you're only men, God help us all when you're famous as well!!

JOSÉ MARÍA. You hold your tongue! As if you didn't know that every woman looking at you now isn't green with envy! [*He kisses her again.*] But then, of course, the men looking at me are even greener. Aren't they . . . aren't they? Well, then . . . all's fair!

MARIANA. Don't you be so conceited! It might be far better for both of us if no one could see us at all! [*Then stepping forward to address the audience.*] But here's an end to our little play, dear Public. And this is its moral. When a woman truly loves a man . . . whether he's a hero or whether he's a scoundrel, she's bound to suffer for it. Because it's like this with love, ladies and gentlemen, whoever can give the most has got the most to lose. It has been a simple story and quite unimportant. But perhaps . . . just because you've heard it so often . . . you may find more to think about in it than you would in many a high-toned tragedy.

And the author asks me to say how much he wishes that the simple words he has used, the simple speech of the common people, will help you to feel as he felt—while he wrote this little song of praise (that's what it is)—the honesty and good sense, the sturdy charm, the self-forgetfulness, the generous heart, the just mind, that go to make that admirable thing, unspoiled, sound as a ripe nut, sweet but not too sweet, Manola, as we call her, the working woman of our Madrid. Such good sense she has! Her heart's in its place, and her head's not too far from it. She walks through the muddy streets keeping her shoes so spotless. How on earth does she do it? Well, her soul is as bright! That's all. Good night!

THE ROMANTIC YOUNG LADY

(SUENO DE UNA NOCHE DE AGOSTO)

COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

TEATRO ESLAVA, MADRID
1918

ROYALTY THEATRE, LONDON
1920

CHARACTERS

ROSARIO.
DOÑA BARBARITA.
MARÍA PEPA.
IRENE.
AMALIA.
THE APPARITION.
EMILIO.
MARIO.
PEPE.
DON JUAN.
GUILLERMO.

The action passes—at the present time, more or less, and in Madrid—between one August evening and the next, at Doña Barbarita's house and at the abode of the Apparition.

ACT I

The scene is in a room in DOÑA BARBARITA'S *house. It is a study furnished modestly but in good taste. There is a table with books, papers, periodicals: a large bookcase full of books; an easy chair; a chaise-longue or a large sofa placed against the table; other chairs of course; some prints and engravings on the walls, of small value but well chosen. There are doors at the back and on the right. The one on the right leads to a bedroom. The one at the back communicates with the rest of the house. At the left is a large window; it must be obvious that it is not a very great height above the street. An electric light fixture hangs from the ceiling; another, movable, with a blue shade is on the table, in such a way that its light is useful to anyone seated, or lying, on the sofa, and that it can be turned out from there without moving.*

At the rising of the curtain, PEPE, *who is about 21, in evening dress but without having yet put on his dinner-coat, is standing before the mirror over the mantelpiece, trying to tie his tie, but not succeeding very well.* EMILIO, *his brother, eight or nine years older, at the table is writing a letter and showing signs of impatience because the pen and ink are not working as well as he would like, and hunting among the papers on the table to find a sheet which he can substitute for the one he has just blotted.*

PEPE. Oh, this tie, Rosario!

ROSARIO. [*From the bedroom.*] I'm coming.

EMILIO. What a pen! What ink! Another blot . . . that sheet's done for now. Where on earth is the writing paper? Rosario!

ROSARIO. I'm coming! I'm coming! [ROSARIO *comes in. She is a very pretty girl of 23.*]

ROSARIO. What *is* the matter?

PEPE. Tie my tie for me.

EMILIO. Where *is* the writing paper?

ROSARIO. [*Affectionately.*] Come here . . . clumsy! What useless creatures men are! [*She ties his tie.*]

EMILIO. And why, may I ask, is the baby of the family to be attended to first?

ROSARIO. Because he howled first. Don't mix up those papers, or Mario will be angry. [*Finishing the tie.*] There! [*To* PEPE.]

EMILIO. And suppose Mario is . . . Does Mario own the whole house?

ROSARIO. Not the house—but the table.

EMILIO. And may I ask why that dearly beloved brother of ours is to keep to himself the only place in the house where one can write?

ROSARIO. Because he's the only one in the house who does any writing. If anyone else had a claim, what about mine, to the table and the room, too?

EMILIO. And am I not writing . . . or trying to—Heaven help me!

ROSARIO. Writing a love letter is not writing. [*She searches the table quickly and methodically.*] Here you are . . . paper, envelope, blotting paper . . . stamp. Now, shall I dictate the letter as well?

EMILIO. No, thank you.

ROSARIO. That's something.

PEPE. The clothes brush?

ROSARIO. I'll lend you one.

[*She goes into the bedroom and comes out almost immediately with a clothes brush in her hand.*]

PEPE. One never can find anything in this house.

ROSARIO. Because you never look in the right place. And haven't you a bedroom to dress in?

PEPE. [*Looking at himself in the glass.*] I can't see myself in the bedroom.

ROSARIO. You're very smart tonight. Where are you off to?

PEPE. The theatre.

ROSARIO. Bent on conquest?

PEPE. Yes, indeed.

ROSARIO. Of the leading lady?

PEPE. Of someone far more important . . . of the leading lady's backer.

ROSARIO. Really!

PEPE. He's an American and a millionaire. And he's looking for a private secretary, and I'm to be introduced to him tonight. If he takes a fancy to me, isn't my fortune made? Off to America, I shall work for him like a nigger, and, in a year or two's time, when he can't do without me, he'll give me a share of his business . . . Say a prayer for me, my child . . . my foot's on the ladder. And when I'm rich, think of all the chocolates I'll buy you.

EMILIO. Could you stop talking just for one minute? I've made three mistakes already.

ROSARIO. [*As she leans over the writing table.*] Passion spelt with one "s" again. Give her my love. Oh, but I wish you'd get married.

EMILIO. Not more than she does.

ROSARIO. Not more than you do, I hope.

EMILIO. Well, you know, personally, now that we've waited five years . . .

ROSARIO. Yes . . . and why have you waited five years? She has to wait till you're rich enough to get married. If I'll kindly wait till you're rich I shall have chocolates.

[DOÑA BARBARITA *and* MARIO *have come in. She is a very old lady and leans on her grandson's arm. He is 27 or so.*]

MARIO. No, my dear, not till then . . . not all that time! Wait till I'm editor of my paper . . . till I've had

a few plays produced. . . . Then you shall see. As you go along the street you'll hear them whispering: "That's Mario Castellanos' sister, Castellanos, the dramatist!

[*While he is talking, he has crossed the room and helped his grandmother to sit down on the sofa near the window.*]

ROSARIO. It's quite like a fairy tale. Once on a time there were three brothers—famous, rich and happy. And they had a sister. Well, what about her?

MARIO. You?

EMILIO. How do you mean? . . . what about you?

ROSARIO. What happens to me when you're all such thrilling successes?

PEPE. I suppose you'll marry.

MARIO. Won't you?

ROSARIO. Suppose I don't?

EMILIO. But why shouldn't you? You're very pretty.

MARIO. And clever enough . . . to be anybody's wife.

ROSARIO. Thank you. [*She curtseys ironically to all three.*]

MARIO. How old are you now, Rosario?

ROSARIO. Can't you remember? Twenty-three last birthday.

EMILIO. Well . . . it *is* time you were looking around.

ROSARIO. [*Very much offended.*] What do you mean?

PEPE. Don't worry, my child. I'll find you a husband.

ROSARIO. Thanks. I'm not sure I'd trust to your taste.

PEPE. Why not?

ROSARIO. Well . . . if I'm to judge by the cigarette girl I saw you out walking with yesterday . . .

PEPE. Oh, did you? I must be off or I shall miss my millionaire. Good-night, Grandmamma. [*He kisses her hand.*] You were married three times, weren't you? Tell this silly girl how to catch a husband before she's past praying for. [*As he goes he tries to kiss* ROSARIO.] Good-night, ugly duckling.

ROSARIO. Run away, idiot!

DOÑA BARBARITA. Don't come walking in at half past nothing o'clock now . . . for I'm awake and I hear you.

PEPE. [*At the door.*] But, my dear Grandmamma, if I'm going to conquer America you must expect me to be late home.

[*He goes off gaily, and outside is heard singing some popular song.*]

DOÑA BARBARITA. That young gentleman is riding for a fall!

EMILIO. Good-night, Grandmamma. [*Kisses her hand.*]

DOÑA BARBARITA. Are you off too?

EMILIO. To post my letter.

ROSARIO. And then to find consolation till the answer comes. That's what you call being in love.

EMILIO. My good child, what do you know about being in love? I shall be a model husband.

DOÑA BARBARITA. Are you taking lessons in the art?

EMILIO. Well . . . anything to forget one's troubles, you know. Good-night.

[*He goes out, embracing* ROSARIO *as he passes her, while she shakes her fist at him affectionately.* ROSARIO *then picks up the torn papers which have been left on the table. She then sets all the table in order, picks up the clothes brush which* PEPE *has left on a chair and goes into the bedroom, and comes back again.* DOÑA BARBARITA *remains seated on the sofa.* MARÍO *walks about idly, looks out of the window at the street, takes another turn and sits down in a chair.*]

ROSARIO. Aren't you off, too?

MARIO. I wish I weren't! But what would my respected editor say if he had to go to press without my column of spiteful gossip about the great ones of the earth? Wait till I'm one of them! Patience . . . patience. [*To* ROSARIO.] Good-night, my precious. Ten years hence, on such a night as this—the poor wretch doing the comic

chippings in my stead will be racking his brains to think—"What can I say this time about Mario Castellanos?"—which is precisely my trouble at the moment over my favourite dramatist. Good-night, Grandmother.

[*He kisses her hand and goes out.*]

ROSARIO. [*Looking out of the window.*] What a divine night! How the jasmine smells. [*Waving her hand.*] Good luck!

DOÑA BARBARITA. Whom are you waving to?

ROSARIO. Mario. [*To the unseen* MARIO.] What? Wait, I'll see. [*As she goes to the table she says to* DOÑA BARBARITA.] His fountain pen! Here!

[*She leans over out of the window to hand it to* MARIO *who is down below.*]

DOÑA BARBARITA. Take care, you'll fall.

ROSARIO. I shouldn't kill myself . . . tumbling six feet into the street.

[*She waves to the disappearing* MARIO*; then sits on the window seat with a sigh.*]

DOÑA BARBARITA. Why are you sighing?

ROSARIO. Envy, I suppose. Off he goes . . . so happily!

DOÑA BARBARITA. To his work.

ROSARIO. Well . . . one to his work, another to amuse himself . . . another to look for his lucky chance. But the thing is that they go . . . and here we stay. [*There is a short pause, then quickly.*] Have you ever noticed, Grandmamma . . . ?

DOÑA BARBARITA. What?

ROSARIO. How quickly men walk off once they reach the door? While we stand buttoning our gloves, and look up the street and down and hesitate . . . as if we feared someone might stop us. It's as if they went off by right but we were stealing out of jail. [*She looks out into the street and takes a deep breath of the perfumed air.*] Oh, what a wonderful night! [*She leaves the window and takes her grandmother's hand sitting close by her.*] Grand-

mother, suppose I should say to you . . . I'm a free woman. I can make a will, run a business, commit suicide, go off to America, go on the stage. Therefore I want a latchkey, just as my brothers have. And I want to come and go as I like just as they do . . . by day or night without questions asked. What would you think of that?

DOÑA BARBARITA. I should think it quite a natural caprice.

ROSARIO. [*A little astonished.*] Would you give it to me?

DOÑA BARBARITA. Why not? The cook's key will be hanging behind the back door. Go and get it, and go out by all means if you want to. [ROSARIO *jumps up.*] Now, I wonder where you'll go.

ROSARIO. [*Perplexed . . . brought to a standstill.*] I know . . . that's just it. Where can a girl go alone at this time of night without fear of being thought something she isn't? Fear! That's a woman's curse.

DOÑA BARBARITA. Perhaps it's her blessing. [*Smiling.*] If we feared as little as men do what the world would think of us we should soon be as shameless as they. And that would be a pity, for if we lost *our* sense of decency where else in the world would you find it?

ROSARIO. [*Sitting down by her grandmother again.*] Do you believe, grandmamma, that all men who go off at night so gaily . . . behave wickedly?

DOÑA BARBARITA. No doubt some of them do . . . and some try to. But most of them only want to pretend that they are being wicked. And I expect that oftenest they all get cheated out of their money and their wickedness both. And that's why they come back so depressed. [*Stroking her hair.*] I shouldn't envy them, my dear, if I were you.

ROSARIO. [*With a great deal of feeling which, little by little, changes into a pretty anger.*] Oh no, not their wickedness, or even their fun, as they call it. But their

courage and their confidence. They're so ready to fight and so sure that they'll win. "I mean to get on—you must get married . . ." to some other bold gentleman who has got on, who can afford to buy me and keep me. "And when we're all rich what a good time we'll give you." Suppose I don't want to be given a good time. [*Imitating* MARIO.] "That's Mario Castellanos' sister" [*With much dignity.*] I don't want to be anyone's sister, or anyone's wife . . . I don't want to reflect someone else's fame. I want to hear them say: "That's Rosario Castellanos." Why can't I be myself? Are you laughing at me?

DOÑA BARBARITA. I seem to remember that while the sun is masculine the moon that reflects him is a lady.

ROSARIO. Yes, in Spanish, but in German the sun's a woman and the moon's a man, and in English, which is a most commonsensical language, sun is sun and moon is moon and each is itself and no one thinks of being masculine or feminine until . . . well, until that particular question arises. [*Sits down yet again by her grandmother.*] You're laughing again. You don't understand—you belong to the past—you all liked being slaves.

DOÑA BARBARITA. No, my dear, only masters like *having* slaves . . . but while you want to be free of the tyranny we were satisfied by being revenged on the tyrants now and then.

ROSARIO. How?

DOÑA BARBARITA. We just made their lives unbearable. [*She takes from her neck a sort of triple locket which she opens. Smiling tenderly.*] My three masters! Ernesto my first, Enrique my second and your grandfather, my dear . . . the third. How they loved me . . . and how I loved them!

ROSARIO. [*Somewhat scandalised.*] All three?

DOÑA BARBARITA. Yes . . . each in turn. And how I plagued them!

ROSARIO. Did you?

DOÑA BARBARITA. [*Very pleased with her conjugal recollections.*] I was jealous of every woman my first husband looked in the face . . . and he was a portrait painter, do you remember? My second husband suffered tortures from his own jealousy . . . of your grandfather. That was premature, but prophetic, for your dear grandfather was our neighbour in those days and he used to stand and look at me from his balcony. And then he in his turn tortured himself, poor man, with jealousy of my second husband, who was dead by that time to be sure . . . but that only seemed to make it worse. When I think of the times I've walked into my first husband's studio, shaking all over, to see what sort of a woman he was painting this time . . . and how much of her, and of the times when I'd glance up at your grandfather on his balcony and let my dear second husband imagine . . . God forgive me . . . that I was smiling at him; and then when your grandfather would catch me looking at my poor second husband's portrait . . . my first husband had painted it while they were both alive . . . and if I wanted to drive him to fury I'd only to give one sigh. Well, now they're in Heaven all three and I'm almost sorry I worried them so. [*And she kisses the three pictures.*]

ROSARIO. Oh, Grandmother!

DOÑA BARBARITA. But never forget that I was an obedient wife, gentle and loving, an angel of the fireside, an angel in crinoline. No doubt it's far nobler to "live your own life" (isn't that what you call it?) but I fear you'll never find it so amusing.

[MARÍA PEPA, *a maid—a family servant, nearly as old as* DOÑA BARBARITA *herself, appears. She remains planted in the doorway with folded arms and doesn't speak.*]

DOÑA BARBARITA. [*Rather ill-humouredly; she knows the footstep so well.*] And what do you want?

MARÍA PEPA. It's past eleven.

DOÑA BARBARITA. What of it?

MARÍA PEPA. You've to put in your curl papers and say your prayers—a special one tonight, too, for tomorrow was Señor Emilio's birthday—and if you stop here talking much longer you won't be in bed before midnight.

DOÑA BARBARITA. What of it?

MARÍA PEPA. You have to be up early tomorrow for Mass, and if you don't get your eight hours and a half you'll have another of your attacks.

DOÑA BARBARITA. [*Slyly.*] What sort of an attack is it *you* get when you try to sit still for five minutes without coming to hear what we're talking about?

MARÍA PEPA. [*Very offended.*] Little I care what you're talking about!

DOÑA BARBARITA. How long have you been listening at the door?

MARÍA PEPA. Listening? Holy saints!

DOÑA BARBARITA. I heard you tiptoeing up the passage like a ghost.

MARÍA PEPA. And if one walks like a human being you say the noise upsets your nerves.

[*She turns to go with extreme dignity.*]

DOÑA BARBARITA. Where are you going?

MARÍA PEPA. To the kitchen . . . my proper place. Where else?

DOÑA BARBARITA. Sit down.

MARÍA PEPA. Thank you. I'm not tired.

DOÑA BARBARITA. Sit down!

[MARÍA PEPA *sits stiffly and haughtily on the edge of a chair.*]

DOÑA BARBARITA. And don't start a grievance when no one has done a thing to you. We're not talking secrets. I was just telling my granddaughter—

MARÍA PEPA. What an angel you were to your three husbands—I heard you.

ROSARIO. [*Bursting into a hearty laugh.*] Oh, María Pepa!

DOÑA BARBARITA. [*Ironically.*] Don't laugh, my

dear, please. She'll take offence and then what shall I do! Has the cook gone to bed yet?

MARÍA PEPA. What on earth would the woman be doing sitting up to this hour?

DOÑA BARBARITA. Good heavens, you talk as if it were three in the morning. Why can't you say at once that you're dead with sleep yourself?

MARÍA PEPA. [*As if she had been accused of a crime.*] I . . . dead with sleep!

DOÑA BARBARITA. Oh, come along, come along. [*Getting up.*] When my maid is tired of course I must go to bed. Good-night, my child.

MARÍA PEPA. Sit up till daybreak if you like. You suffer for it, not I!

ROSARIO. [*Kissing her.*] Good-night, Grandmamma.

DOÑA BARBARITA. [*Patting her cheek.*] But don't sit up till all hours reading.

ROSARIO. No, Grandmamma.

MARÍA PEPA. She will, she will! If food failed I believe the women of this family could eat books. It's an unnatural appetite.

DOÑA BARBARITA. Well, you're no glutton. Sixty-five years I've been trying to teach you your letters.

MARÍA PEPA. Thank you. I hear enough lies as it is without splitting my skull getting more out of books.

DOÑA BARBARITA. Get back to your tub, Diogenes, and don't talk so much.

[*The two go out, arm in arm without its being quite clear which one is supporting the other.* ROSARIO, *with her characteristic instinct of order, puts the furniture in place almost unconsciously, afterwards she sighs, stretches herself lazily, yawns, sighs again, yields to the little clock which is on the mantelpiece, begins to unhook her dress. When she has it nearly unhooked, she goes into the bedroom, and comes out after a minute with a kimono half put on and some slippers in her hand. She finishes putting on the kimono, sits down*

on the sofa, takes off her shoes, and puts on the slippers, puts the shoes carefully under the sofa, takes her hair down serenely, lights the lamp which is near the sofa, puts out the other light; throws herself comfortably on the sofa and begins to read. MARÍA PEPA *comes back and goes towards the window.*]

ROSARIO. [*Without looking up from her book.*] What are you doing?

MARÍA PEPA. I must shut the window. There's going to be a storm. There's a big wind blowing up.

ROSARIO. I'll shut it when I go to bed. [*Goes on reading.*]

MARÍA PEPA. [*Hovering near the writing table for a chance of conversation.*] Your brother's verses mustn't be blown about, or there'll be trouble.

ROSARIO. Put a paper weight on them.

MARÍA PEPA. I'll put the sheep dog on them. That's heavy.

ROSARIO. It's not a sheep dog; it's a lion.

MARÍA PEPA. [*Placing the paper-weight which is, indeed, a bronze lion.*] When first I saw it I thought it was a sheep dog. I've always called it a sheep dog and I always shall. [ROSARIO *goes on reading, but* MARÍA PEPA *goes on talking nevertheless.*] It was a present from Señor Enrique—that was your dear grandmother's second husband, but before he was her husband, to Señor Ernesto —that was her first husband—given on her birthday. She was twenty-three and she wore a Scotch plaid poplin with a green velvet coat hemmed with gold acorns which was a sight for sore eyes and I have it still put away and not at all moth-eaten. Your poor grandfather . . . God rest his soul . . . hated the sight of it.

ROSARIO. [*Interested in spite of herself.*] The green velvet?

MARÍA PEPA. No, the sheep dog. Because your grandmother whenever she went into the room where it stood on the table, always stroked it . . . so. [*Stroking the bronze*

lion.] And one day when he would have her go to the theatre with him on the very anniversary as it was of her second husband's death which, of course, she couldn't, he changed into a basilisk as soon as she had left the room crying like a Magdalen, and he took the sheep dog and threw it at Señor Ernesto's—no, at Señor Enrique's portrait which hung over the mantelpiece and, as it is a bronze dog, of course the glass was broken so he had to have a new frame made carved with a crown of laurel and bevelled glass and that cost him a lot of money.

[*All this* MARÍA PEPA *says without taking breath.*]

ROSARIO. Grandmamma liked her second husband, didn't she, the best of the three?

MARÍA PEPA. [*With disdainful and Olympian superiority.*] I can tell you this much . . . that your poor dear grandfather was the worst.

ROSARIO. Oh, María!

MARÍA PEPA. [*With resentful calm.*] God forgive him . . . a jealous, obstinate, stingy tyrant; and the only way to manage him at all was just to keep on reminding him what a perfect angel the one before him had been. Though he had given us trouble enough, heaven knows, for he was a gambler. And when he lost—which was always—the way we had to pinch and screw! And that didn't come easily at all because Señor Ernesto—he was her first—though he wasn't a practical man being an artist and he told lies worse than the newspapers—still he was generous and while he was alive your dear grandmamma never put her foot to the ground. "Angels mustn't tread on the dust of the earth," he'd say, and not a yard did we go without our own carriage. Though for all that we might go to bed without supper sometimes because, if he didn't paint why he didn't earn anything, and there'd be times when he lacked inspiration—so he said, and he'd lie on the sofa for weeks at a stretch in a state of artistic torpor—smoking, just smoking. But a kinder, refineder, more considerate and gentlemanly man . . .

ROSARIO. There's grandmamma's bell.

MARÍA PEPA. That means she has finished her beads. Will you turn out the lights?

ROSARIO. Yes, I'll put out the lights. And I'll close the window. Take away those shoes, please.

MARÍA PEPA. [*Picking up the shoes with a sigh.*] Well, pray God you may never know the troubles of a married life.

ROSARIO. Thank you! [*She is very offended.*]

MARÍA PEPA. Ah! . . . you mean to get married, do you? And to half a dozen, I daresay, just to outdo your grandmother. . . . Well, if you make your bed you must lie on it. [*With compassionate superiority.*] We shan't be able to help you. We shall be snugly in Heaven. Though what's going to happen there when they all three come out to meet us, each one expecting to have us all to himself for eternity . . . ! They'll fight it out, I suppose.

ROSARIO. María, that's the third time the bell has rung.

MARÍA PEPA. [*Calmly.*] I hear it. No doubt St. Peter will settle things somehow. I'll shut the door, there's a draught.

[*She goes out slowly, having closed the bedroom door.* ROSARIO *tries to return to her reading, but she can't do it because* MARÍA PEPA'S *reminiscences have distracted her attention from her book. She meditates incoherently.*]

ROSARIO. Half a dozen! [*She starts reading her book aloud, though in a low voice, so that she may enjoy the poetry of it more.*] "Love is a solitary flower of an exquisite evanescent fragrance." How true—a *solitary* flower. "It blooms but once in the life of the soul and then the soul which this triumphant lily has enriched. . . ." This triumphant lily? What a wonderful phrase . . . "dies when it dies, but ony for love's single service can it wish to live." Ah yes! But then how could grandmamma have

been really in love with all three of them? "But into a life may come visions and phantoms, envoys and heralds of the true love that still delays . . ." [*Meditating.*] That might explain it. Grandpapa came last, so her first and her second were heralds and phantoms perhaps. "But on that divine night, when the love of Carlos and Esperanza . . ." [*She goes on reading in an undertone for a minute, but interrupts herself almost immediately turning over and supporting herself on an elbow.*] Or was grandpapa a herald and a phantom, too, and did grandmamma only think she loved all three because she really never loved anyone at all? I wonder! [*Reads.*] "But on that divine night . . ." [*Impatiently.*] Oh, I can't read.

[*The wind can be heard blowing.*]

What a wind! I'd better go to bed. But then I shall only dream of all three of them fighting over grandmamma at the gate of Heaven. I'll lie still for ten minutes and think.

[*She switches off the light without moving from the sofa and lies down again. The room remains in the dark, lighted only at intervals by the light, not very brilliant, which comes in by the window. The wind goes on howling.*]

ROSARIO. I do believe there will be a storm. What a dust! I'd better shut the window. . . . Too much bother.

[*By this time she is half asleep. Suddenly a straw hat, carried on the violent wind, blows in the window, and falls beside the sofa.*]

ROSARIO. [*Opening her eyes.*] What's that? Something flew in at the window? [*Looking round her to see, but not getting up.*] A bird? A hat! A man's hat . . . what has happened?

[*She looks alternately on the floor, where the hat is and at the window. She gets up with a certain timidity and goes slowly towards the window. At this moment there is a tremendous lightning flash, fol-*

lowed immediately by a terrifying burst of thunder, and in the really infernal resplendence of the lightning flash there appears at the window the figure of a well-dressed, but hatless man, who looks around the room a second, and then jumps. ROSARIO, *terrified and bewildered by the thunder and lightning, sees the man, and not knowing whether he is reality or a vision, remains frozen with horror and gasps in a low voice.*]

ROSARIO. Jesu! Ave Maria! Virgén del Carmen! Blessed souls in Purgatory! Blessed Saint Barbara who art enrolled in Heaven . . .

THE APPARITION. [*Observing that there is a woman in the room, and going toward her uncertainly, because an almost total obscurity has succeeded to the lightning flash.*] Don't be alarmed . . . please don't be alarmed.

[*There is another flash, then thunder and then a perfect downpour of rain begins.* ROSARIO *sees by the light of the lightning flash that the man is directing himself toward her, and, horrified, stretches out her arms to keep him off.*]

ROSARIO. Keep off! Keep away! Help!

THE APPARITION. [*Going up to her.*] Don't shout . . for Heaven's sake, don't shout. I'm not a thief. I am an entirely respectable person.

ROSARIO. Yes, yes . . . but go away!

THE APPARITION. I am going, Señora, this very minute.

[*But in the darkness he has accidentally come quite close to her and when he moves he finds that a piece of her hair is entangled in his sleeve link.*]

THE APPARITION. No . . . I can't!

ROSARIO. Why not?

THE APPARITION. Your hair has got twisted in my sleeve links.

ROSARIO. [*Impatiently.*] Then untwist it at once.

THE APPARITION. That's not so easy . . . in the

dark. Could you turn on some light perhaps . . . where is it?

ROSARIO. On the table. [*She starts to move, and he follows her, but in spite of his precautions, he pulls her hair.*] Aah! . . . You're pulling my hair. It hurts.

THE APPARITION. Ten thousand apologies! [*He stops, and as she is going on, he pulls it a second time.*]

ROSARIO. [*Angrily.*] But come with me . . . then it won't.

THE APPARITION. I'm coming . . . I'm coming.

[*But as they go towards the table in the pitch dark he stumbles; and to save himself—and her—puts his arms round her. They fall on the sofa together.*]

ROSARIO. How dare you? This is outrageous. How dare you put your arms round me?

[*Another lightning flash discloses the situation.*]

THE APPARITION. [*Very calmly.*] I assure you I did not put my arms round you. I fell . . . and you fell in them. And I have bruised my shin most confoundedly. This is quite as unpleasant for me as for you.

[*She makes a gesture of protesting amazement . . . whether at the supposition that any man could find it disagreeable to have his arms around her or not.*]

ROSARIO. Then if you realise that please move away . . . as far as you can . . . till I've turned on the light.

THE APPARITION. [*Calmly.*] But now your hair has caught in my studs and if I move at all I shall hurt you extremely. Until you can turn on the light I'm very much afraid there's no real alternative . . . to this.

ROSARIO. [*Impatiently.*] Very well then, don't move. I mean . . . do move . . . when I move. Now.

[*She tries to find the light, but her hair is badly pulled in spite of precautions.*]

ROSARIO. Oh—oh—oh!

THE APPARITION. I told you so.

ROSARIO. [*As she manages at last to turn on the light.*] Thank heaven!

[*The two then look at each other for a moment in silence and with not a little curiosity. Then he speaks, very much at his ease.*]

THE APPARITION. Now perhaps we can undo the tangle. If you'll try the stud I'll do the sleeve-links.

[*They devote themselves to the job in silence. After a moment he says quite casually.*]

THE APPARITION. You really have most infernal hair.

ROSARIO. [*Offended.*] I beg your pardon?

THE APPARITION. I meant for present purposes. Does it often get caught up like this. And do you always wear it floating in the breeze?

ROSARIO. [*Offended.*] I wear it as I choose.

THE APPARITION. Quite so . . . and of course it's not very long. I beg your pardon. That again is not criticism. If I had to criticise I should say only that you must find it most inconveniently fine. But a charming colour.

ROSARIO. [*Furious.*] Thank you.

THE APPARITION. And it smells of . . . what is it, violets? Violets.

ROSARIO. How dare you?

THE APPARITION. Don't move please . . . it'll hurt you horribly. But it does smell of violets surely.

ROSARIO. [*Now at the height of her indignation.*] Does that concern you?

THE APPARITION. I never said it concerned me. I said it smelt of violets. I'm sorry that offended you—but it does.

ROSARIO. As you please. Have you finished? [*She has by this time got the studs free.*]

THE APPARITION. Not nearly.

ROSARIO. [*Reaching to the table for some scissors.*] Take them! Cut it!

THE APPARITION. Cut it! But what a pity!

ROSARIO. Cut it! Give them to me, then. [*She cuts*

herself free.] There! [*She rises with dignity and turns to him.*] And now.

THE APPARITION. [*Who rises too and bows to her most formally.*] Señora . . . or Señorita . . .

ROSARIO. [*Without noticing either the bow or the interruption.*] Would you please explain why a thoroughly respectable person—as you say you are—[*She looks at him up and down and observes that he is, indeed, very well dressed in informal evening clothes,*] has presumed to enter a stranger's house like this? [*The beginning of the sentence is said with great violence but at the end it has been modified to something like suavity.*]

THE APPARITION. Certainly. This high wind which preceded this storm blew my hat off my head, but thoughtfully blew it in here. I came in to find it. Having found it I will, with your kind permission, take my leave.

ROSARIO. [*Angry again, because his calm manner makes her so nervous.*] And so, for the sake of a miserable straw hat, you jump in at a window like a burglar at this time of night.

THE APPARITION. Señora—or Señorita . . . ?

ROSARIO. [*Shortly.*] Señorita.

THE APPARITION. [*Bowing and smiling.*] Señorita . . . so much depends upon one's point of view. To you my hat—[*He picks it up.*] and I grant you aviation is not a suitable career for it—is naturally a thing of no consequence. But to me it was . . . and on this occasion particularly so, for I was on my way to keep a most important appointment.

ROSARIO. Indeed!

THE APPARITION. And I prefer not to walk through the streets in this weather bareheaded and arrive looking like a pursued pickpocket. Sooner than take the liberty of ringing the bell of a strange house and waking everyone up I climbed in at the window. The room was dark, I thought no one was here. I meant to get my hat and

go on my way and, if you had not made such a needless noise . . .

ROSARIO. Do you expect—

THE APPARITION. . . . I should have gone as I came, quite quietly, quite discreetly.

ROSARIO. [*Convinced, but a little annoyed with herself for having let herself be convinced.*] Very well, I accept the explanation. And now, having recovered the priceless object will you be good enough to show your discretion—by going as you came—and at once.

[*She makes a magnificent gesture towards the window and then sits down with her back to it. He goes and looks out, then turns.*]

THE APPARITION. Señorita!

ROSARIO. [*Without moving.*] What is it?

THE APPARITION. It's pouring in torrents.

ROSARIO. And what of that?

THE APPARITION. Well, I haven't an umbrella; it was quite fine when I started. If I launch myself into this flood in two minutes I shall look like a drowned rat.

ROSARIO. [*With completely unreasonable but entirely feminine animosity.*] And quite unfit to be seen by the lady you are going to visit.

[*He is startled for a moment. Then he smiles and sits by her on the sofa.*]

THE APPARITION. And who told you it was a lady?

ROSARIO. [*Rising indignantly.*] Go away at once. The rain is stopping.

THE APPARITION. The rain is not stopping.

[*And indeed it is pouring harder than ever.* ROSARIO *makes a gesture of despair.*]

THE APPARITION. Besides, look at the concierge standing at the door of the house opposite. If he sees me jump out of the window he'd either think I'm a thief and arrest me . . . or he will not arrest me thinking . . . that I'm leaving by the window for reasons best known to both of us. And then you will be horribly compromised.

ROSARIO. [*Dismayed.*] So I shall be!

THE APPARITION. [*Most respectfully.*] Therefore, with your approval, I'll wait till he has gone in, and that will prevent any possible scandal.

ROSARIO. [*In a voice of anguish.*] Please sit down.

THE APPARITION. Thanks. [*He sits at a most respectful distance.*]

ROSARIO. We must certainly prevent any possible scandal. [*There is a pause. Then* ROSARIO'S *anguish develops into anger again and she speaks, half to him, half to herself.*]

ROSARIO. When is one allowed to forget one's misfortune in being a woman!

THE APPARITION. Do you find that a misfortune?

ROSARIO. Isn't this a good sample of it? You jump out of my window, with my connivance, so people think, and my reputation is gone. Mine . . . but not yours . . . oh no! Do you call that fair?

THE APPARITION. [*Humbly.*] No, Señora.

ROSARIO. [*Aggressively.*] Does it seem to you just that men should have all the rights and women none?

THE APPARITION. You feel you should be free to jump in and out of windows if you want to?

ROSARIO. Not at all . . . But I think the man who jumps out of windows should be as much dishonoured as the woman who remains within.

THE APPARITION. Yes, there's something in that.

ROSARIO. There is everything in it. Equal rights . . . equal obligations.

THE APPARITION. [*With a slight twinkle, with the least touch of irony in his voice—she is so very young.*] I see that you are very advanced in your ideas.

ROSARIO. [*Getting up with great dignity.*] I hope so. [*He smiles.*] Do you doubt it?

THE APPARITION. Forgive me for questioning it just a little, when I see that you waste your time reading . . .

this sort of stuff. [*He points to the book that she has left on the sofa.*]

ROSARIO. [*Bridling.*] Really! Do you happen to know what that book is?

THE APPARITION. Yes, it is a sentimental novel called "A Spring Romance."

ROSARIO. [*Challenging.*] Have you read it?

THE APPARITION. Yes, I have read it.

ROSARIO. [*Sarcastically.*] But it doesn't please you?

THE APPARITION. [*With a slight grimace of contempt.*] Well . . . it isn't so badly written.

ROSARIO. [*Indignant.*] It is beautifully written.

THE APPARITION. But the writer's conception of life—

ROSARIO. What's wrong with that, pray?

THE APPARITION. The fellow hasn't any sense.

ROSARIO. Señor!

THE APPARITION. His heroine's a fool of a girl with not an idea in her head except love; all she wants is to be lied to in the moonlight by a young man who is, if possible, a bigger fool than she. Every half dozen pages or so they are swearing their love will endure for eternity . . . which is absurd; and that they'll be faithful to death . . . which is almost as unlikely.

ROSARIO. Good heavens!

THE APPARITION. The situations are ridiculous. Now, that "divine night of love" in a gondola . . .

ROSARIO. . . . When they float through the narrow canals of Venice.

THE APPARITION. Well, now, have you ever floated at night through the narrow canals of Venice? They smell most abominably, and anything may be thrown out of windows on your head . . . I assure you, anything.

ROSARIO. [*Scandalised.*] You are very vulgar.

THE APPARITION. [*Politely.*] I am a man of ordinary common sense. I like the realities of life. And, if you were what you like to think yourself—a "modern" woman instead of being—forgive me—a girl trying to bal-

ance herself between new ideas and traditional sentiments . . .

ROSARIO. [*Interrupting him.*] Señor, doesn't it occur to you that one needs now and then a dream and a little poetry to compensate, perhaps, for those more real things which will never come one's way? This man can probe the depths—the very depths—of a woman's heart. [*She tries to make these speeches sound imposing . . . but she is very young.*]

THE APPARITION. Do you really think so?

ROSARIO. Do you deny it?

THE APPARITION. I think that the poor wretch writes his stories as well as he knows how and stuffs them full of all the pretty lies he can invent in the hope of selling as many as possible to that vast crowd of old-fashioned, romantically minded women who . . .

ROSARIO. Please don't talk such libellous nonsense. He is a genius. And womanhood—all that is best in it—owes him a deep debt of gratitude. And I wish I could tell him so . . . old fashioned and romantic though I may be.

THE APPARITION. Well . . . I think that could be managed.

ROSARIO. [*Marvelling.*] Do you mean that you know him?

THE APPARITION. Oh yes, I know him!

ROSARIO. You're not friends?

THE APPARITION. Well, I could introduce you both to each other. I'll write him a letter.

ROSARIO. [*Enthusiastically.*] Oh, will you? It isn't asking too much?

THE APPARITION. Not a bit. [*He sits at the table and starts to write.*] Now then . . . "I very much want you to know Señorita . . ." By the way, what's your name?

ROSARIO. Rosario Castellanos. [*But her face has fallen; and he notices it.*]

THE APPARITION. What's troubling you?

ROSARIO. Nothing . . . that is . . . no, nothing. [*Distressed but still determined.*] Please go on with the letter. What are you laughing at?

THE APPARITION. You, a strong-minded, up-to-date woman sitting quaking at the mere thought of going to call on a distinguished author . . . just to tell him how much you admire his work. Come, come, now . . . equal rights, equal responsibilities, you know.

ROSARIO. [*Angry.*] I am not quaking. I don't in the least mind going. It's only for fear he should misunderstand.

THE APPARITION. What . . . that expert in women's hearts misunderstand?

ROSARIO. [*Exceedingly angry.*] Please go on writing the letter.

THE APPARITION. Still—he's a lucky fellow!

ROSARIO. [*Flashing resentment at his mischievous tone.*] Please do not write that letter.

THE APPARITION. But why disappoint yourself—?

ROSARIO. That is my business.

THE APPARITION. Well, let's think of some other plan. Ah!

ROSARIO. What?

THE APPARITION. Have you this morning's newspaper?

ROSARIO *takes it from a heap of papers, gives it to him and he starts searching among the advertisements.*]

THE APPARITION. Because I rather think that . . . yes. Read that.

ROSARIO. [*Reading.*] "Wanted, well-educated and responsible lady as secretary to a literary man. Typing, not shorthand." [*Without taking breath.*] Do you think that is . . .

THE APPARITION. I know it is. . . . That's his address. A fortnight ago I heard him say he'd be wanting a secretary—and this morning I saw this. What luck! You can take him the letter. I'll change it a little—on the

pretext of applying for the place. [*He sets himself to finish his letter.*]

ROSARIO. Thank you . . . I think that I will apply for the place.

THE APPARITION. [*Astonished.*] What did you say? Apply for the . . . seriously?

ROSARIO. Why not? I'm quite responsible and fairly well educated. I know French, German, English—besides Spanish.

THE APPARITION. Splendid!

ROSARIO. Well, what is astonishing you then?

THE APPARITION. [*Looking round the room.*] It is only that I fancied—to judge by the way you live—that you had no need to—

ROSARIO. Earn my living? I needn't. I have brothers quite ready to earn it for me. [*Pathetically.*] There again . . . that's the bitter humiliation of being a woman. One must rise above that. I want to work—to earn the bread that I eat. I am tired of being a parasite.

THE APPARITION. [*As he writes.*] Talk like that to him and, as a literary man, he will engage you at once. [*He gives her the letter while he writes an envelope.*]

ROSARIO. [*Reading it with great delight.*] Oh, how kind you are. [*When she reaches the signature she makes a slight grimace.*] Your name is Obdulio . . . ?

THE APPARITION. [*Resigned and meek.*] Yes, Señorita, Obdulio Gomez. Commonplace, isn't it? But we're not all lucky enough to be called, as your hero is, Luis Felipe de Córdoba. Ah, well!

[*He sighs, puts the letter in the envelope and hands it to her.*]

ROSARIO. Thank you a thousand times. [*She puts the letter in her dress and gives him her hand.*]

THE APPARITION. [*Holding her hand and bowing.*] Not at all. I shall be proud to have helped a little towards raising you from the humiliation of being merely a most attractive young lady.

[*They shake hands smilingly. At that moment* PEPE *and* EMILIO *can be heard letting themselves into the house and rather noisily.* PEPE *is singing.*]

EMILIO'S VOICE. Shut up man, for heaven's sake. You'll rouse the house.

ROSARIO. Good heavens . . . there are my brothers.

[*She starts to run.* THE APPARITION *catches for a minute at her wrap.*]

THE APPARITION. But . . . please . . .

ROSARIO. Let me go . . . let me go.

[*She bolts into her bedroom, losing a slipper as she goes.* THE APPARITION *picks it up and stands for a moment holding it. The two boys are in the passage now, so he moves to the window. But before he can reach it, they are in the room.* PEPE *is still singing sotto voce.*]

EMILIO. Oh, do be quiet.

PEPE. [*Seeing* THE APPARITION.] What's that? A man!

EMILIO. Catch him!

[*They proceed to try. But* THE APPARITION *is too much for them. He throws them both off and to the floor. Then he jumps out of the window.*

PEPE. Thief!

EMILIO. Stop thief.

[*The noise brings in* DOÑA BARBARITA *and* MARÍA PEPA *in their dressing gowns. They may look a little odd, but* DOÑA BARBARITA *is as dignified as ever.*]

DOÑA BARBARITA. Whatever is happening?

MARÍA PEPA. What is all this?

[ROSITA *appears from her bedroom, limping because she has only one slipper but with the most innocent air in the world.*]

ROSARIO. What on earth are you shouting about?

EMILIO. [*Who has succeeded in getting up.*] A man.

PEPE. In the room.

MARÍA PEPA. A man!

ROSARIO. [*With the greatest innocence.*] Nonsense.

EMILIO. Was it indeed?

ROSARIO. How could he have got in?

PEPE. By the way he went out . . . The window.

ROSARIO. Impossible!

MARÍA PEPA. This comes of getting too merry. You see things.

EMILIO. Well, I like that!

PEPE. The rain has gone to our heads, I suppose.

EMILIO. [*To* PEPE.] Didn't you see him as plainly as . . .

PEPE. [*Rubbing his arm.*] I felt him.

DOÑA BARBARITA. Well, I daresay, I daresay—

[*But suddenly* EMILIO *sees on a chair . . . the straw hat.*]

EMILIO. And here is his hat.

DOÑA BARBARITA, ROSARIO, and MARÍA PEPA. [*Together.*] His hat!

EMILIO and PEPE. [*Together.*] So now, what do you say?

ROSARIO. Let me see it.

[*She takes it and then . . . deliberately throws it out of the window.*]

PEPE and EMILIO. What are you doing?

ROSARIO. Sending it after its owner.

[*And now, as if in exchange for the hat, there sails in* ROSARIO'S *slipper, which falls at her feet.*]

MARÍA PEPA. What's that?

PEPE and EMILIO. A slipper!

ROSARIO. [*Completely off her guard.*] My slipper!!

DOÑA BARBARITA. [*Who has been watching her keenly.*] My dear child . . . think what you're saying.

EMILIO. Your *slipper.*

PEPE. *Your* slipper.

ROSARIO. [*Losing her head completely.*] Yes . . . it is—but . . . that's to say.

EMILIO and PEPE. How did he get your slipper?

ROSARIO. I don't know.

PEPE. You must know.

EMILIO. Explain.

PEPE. Tell us at once.

ROSARIO. But I . . . it is my slipper . . . but—[*She gasps.*]

EMILIO and PEPE. Go on.

EMILIO. Will you go on, please.

[ROSARIO *finding no way out, falls flat on the sofa.*]

MARÍA PEPA. [*Running to her.*] She has fainted.

DOÑA BARBARITA. [*To herself.*] Thank God . . . I was afraid that it wouldn't occur to her.

EMILIO. Don't faint!

PEPE. Don't be a fool.

EMILIO. Tell us what has happened.

DOÑA BARBARITA. Keep away from her—let her be. When a woman sees fit to faint . . . there's no more to be said.

ACT II

The Scene is the working-room of the novelist, Luis Felipe de Córdoba. It is a room with bright walls, and a great deal of light which comes in by two large windows with balconies; it is furnished with much comfort, but without any pretensions to fashion. A big writing table—not a desk—is placed near one of the two balconies, on it the disorder of a table where anyone works; sheets of papers, books, periodicals, and reviews—among them three or four foreign ones—of fashions and women's affairs. Near the other balcony is a typist's table, with its typewriter and sufficient work ready on it, shorthand tablets, papers ready for the machine. Nearly all the left wall (except the space where a door opens on the inside rooms) is occupied by a wide and comfortable divan. Near it there is another small table, also full of books and papers; but in perfect order. Over the divan are some small pictures and a little mirror of porcelain or carving; the only one there is in the room. On the right wall there is another door which is supposed to lead to the vestibule, and by which people coming in from the street enter. The rest of the wall is occupied by a low bookcase, full of books; on the top of the bookcase some well-chosen china. On the walls some few good modern pictures and old engravings. On the big writing-table a gold fish bowl with gold fish swimming in it. On the floor, before the divan the working-table and the typist's table are bright coloured rush mats. There are some very comfortable English chairs and armchairs.

On the rising of the curtain IRENE *and* DON JUAN *are discovered.* IRENE, *the secretary, is an attractive girl of twenty-two. She is wearing a simple tailor suit and a black apron.* DON JUAN *is a gentleman of 50, well-dressed*

and rather foolish. The secretary is at her table, putting her notes and papers in perfect order. DON JUAN *walks up and down while he is talking. Although he is paying a visit, he has neither hat nor stick, because he has left both of them in the hall.*

DON JUAN. Our distinguished novelist is a long time.

IRENE. [*Very occupied.*] Yes.

DON JUAN. Do you know where he has gone?

IRENE. [*Still very occupied.*] No.

DON JUAN. Doesn't usually go out in the morning, does he?

IRENE. [*Even more occupied.*] No. [*With a gleam of hope.*] If you'd like to leave a message—

DON JUAN. I'd rather wait if it doesn't disturb you.

IRENE. Not in the least.

DON JUAN. [*Who is one of those people who cannot keep quiet even though they know that they are annoying other people by talking.*] Is that work you are doing?

IRENE. No. [*She has finished, and is now putting her papers in order.*] Work is over.

DON JUAN. For today?

IRENE. For ever and a day. That was my last "official" job. [*Rises.*]

DON JUAN. "Official"?

IRENE. Well, I must look in unofficially for a few days to put the new secretary in the way of things.

DON JUAN. Oho! A new secretary?

IRENE. [*Laughing.*] Don't rejoice too soon . . . she's not engaged yet. He put aside a whole lot of applications this morning, too.

[*She goes up to the table and puts the books and papers in order.*]

DON JUAN. Am I likely to rejoice at the thought of losing you. Irene, Irene . . . how dare you desert us!

IRENE. [*Smiling.*] How dare I get married?

DON JUAN. Is he *very* fond of you?

IRENE. [*Laughing.*] Scandalously.

DON JUAN. In the army, isn't he? And twenty-four?

IRENE. [*Very well content and enumerating prettily.*] He's an engineer, he's very good-looking and he's an only son. Anything else you'd like to know?

DON JUAN. [*Going close to her.*] Why wouldn't you marry me?

IRENE. [*Moving away from him and looking at him with mocking seriousness.*] It would have seemed so . . . disrespectful.

DON JUAN. What a delicate reminder that I'm too old.

IRENE. [*Very modestly.*] Not at all . . . but there's a limit even to my daring.

DON JUAN. [*Going close to her again.*] But tell me—

IRENE. [*Moving away from him again and profoundly respectful.*] Well?

DON JUAN. [*Mischievously, pointing to the chair which undoubtedly is that of the novelist, and as if he were present.*] Why haven't you married the "great man?"

IRENE. [*Laughing.*] How many more?

DON JUAN. [*Impudently.*] Didn't you ever find yourselves falling the least little bit in love?

IRENE. [*A little drily, because the conversation is beginning to annoy her, but forcing herself to keep up her jesting tone.*] It never occurred to us.

DON JUAN. Not to him?

IRENE. Not to my knowledge.

DON JUAN. I can't believe it. For three years you've been typing out these love scenes for him.

IRENE. Just three years.

DON JUAN. Why, if it was only to get a fresh idea or two for them.

IRENE. [*Very serious and annoyed.*] Do you mind my telling you that the "great man" as you call him, is not only a distinguished novelist but a distinguished gentleman as well . . . who knows the difference between a secretary and an . . .

DON JUAN. I beg your pardon.

IRENE. Not at all.

[*She gets to the typewriter again.*]

DON JUAN. [*Incorrigible.*] You said you'd finished work.

IRENE. [*Very drily.*] I've some letters of my own to write.

[*She writes violently.*]

DON JUAN. You want me to go?

IRENE. [*Without looking at him.*] I don't think Señor de Córdoba will be in before lunch.

[*She continues writing violently and making a great deal of noise with the machine.*]

DON JUAN. Well, if that's so . . . good morning.

IRENE. [*Without changing her attitude.*] Good morning.

DON JUAN. [*Hoping even yet to renew the conversation.*] You will excuse me?

IRENE. Certainly.

DON JUAN. I hope you will be very happy.

IRENE. Thank you.

[DON JUAN *prepares to leave, but at the door stumbles on* GUILLERMO, *who is the novelist's servant.* GUILLERMO *is a man of more than 50, of a type, half servant, half professor. He is completely bald, and is scrupulously well-dressed, not in livery, but in a suit of good material, and well cut, though evidently not made for him; he is in fact dressed in his master's cast off clothes. He is amiable, smiling, discreet.* DON JUAN *pauses on seeing him come in, because he likes to know everything that is going on, and wants to find out who has come.*]

GUILLERMO. Señorita Irene, there's a young lady come in answer to the advertisement.

DON JUAN. [*Pleasantly excited.*] Aha! . . . a recruit to replace a deserter.—[*To* GUILLERMO.] Is she pretty?

[GUILLERMO *does not answer and looks imperturbably at* IRENE.]

IRENE. Show her in. [*To* DON JUAN *who, as a pretext for awaiting the candidate's entrance, looks from one side to another as if in search of something.*] If you are looking for your hat it is in the hall.

DON JUAN. [*Ironically.*] Thank you!

[*He is preparing to leave, seeing there is nothing else for it, when* GUILLERMO *shows in* ROSARIO, *who is shy and a little inclined to take* DON JUAN *for the novelist. He'd be willing enough, but* IRENE *interrupts with:*]

IRENE. Guillermo, please give Señor Don Juan Medina his hat.

GUILLERMO. Sí, Señorita. [*He holds the door for* DON JUAN *who goes out, furious with* IRENE.]

ROSARIO. Oh, I thought—

IRENE. [*Amiably.*] That he was Señor de Córdoba . . . not he, indeed. Señor de Córdoba won't be long . . . if you don't mind waiting. Do sit down.

ROSARIO. [*Without sitting down.*] Are you . . . Señora de—

IRENE. [*Smiling.*] I'm his secretary.

ROSARIO. [*Nervously.*] Oh . . . then it's no use my waiting. I came . . .

IRENE. No, no . . . do sit down please. I should have said "I was." I'm only staying on till my successor can take possession. [*She evidently takes to* ROSARIO *in a flash, as a young girl may.*] I hope he'll engage you. I would.

ROSARIO. Thank you *so* much.

IRENE. [*Looking about the room almost maternally.*] Well—I should hate to leave all this . . . that I've grown so fond of . . . to anyone who wouldn't appreciate it.

ROSARIO. Why are you giving it up?

IRENE. Change of profession. I'm getting married.

ROSARIO. To . . . him?

IRENE. Oh no. You've never met him?

ROSARIO. Señor de Córdoba?

IRENE. Yes.

ROSARIO. No . . . is he married?

IRENE. No.

ROSARIO. [*Wishing to show how casual she is about it.*] I admire his work immensely. [*She emphasises the "work."*] I've tried so often to get a picture of him, but they're not to be had.

IRENE. No, he won't be photographed. He prefers, he says, to have his woman readers picture him each for herself, and he doesn't want to spoil any one of their illusions.

ROSARIO. Is he so ugly?

IRENE. [*With all the indifference of a young lady who is going to be married.*] Oh no, I shouldn't call him ugly —not bad looking—for a civilian.

ROSARIO. He's not young?

IRENE. Thirty-eight.

ROSARIO. Is this where he works? What a charming room—and so beautifully kept!

IRENE. [*Drily.*] Yes . . . he's the untidiest man in the world, and the one thing he won't stand is untidiness. That's where his secretary comes in. He'll go out leaving his writing strewn all over the place, pages unnumbered, books on the floor, torn up paper in the drawers and his notes in the waste paper basket. But when he comes back, he likes to find everything just so. Have you ever done this sort of work before?

ROSARIO. Not just this sort.

IRENE. You've been in an office?

ROSARIO. I—I saw the advertisement. I came with a letter.

IRENE. [*Interested.*] Oh!

ROSARIO. Here.

[*She takes the letter which* THE APPARITION *gave her out of her bag and offers it to* IRENE.]

IRENE. Better leave it on the table.

[*She takes it and puts it there, then, at the sight of the handwriting, gives a jump.*]

IRENE. Well!

ROSARIO. [*Alarmed.*] What is it?

IRENE. [*Puzzled, looking at the letter and at* ROSARIO.] Who gave you this letter?

ROSARIO. [*A little curtly.*] A friend.

IRENE. [*Still watching her.*] Gave it to you . . . personally?

ROSARIO. Yes. Why?

IRENE. I thought I knew the handwriting.

[*She leaves the letter on the table.*]

ROSARIO. It's from Don Obdulio Gomez.

IRENE. [*Full of amazement.*] Then you know . . . Señor Gomez.

ROSARIO. Why not? Is it any disgrace?

IRENE. [*Smiling.*] No, of course not.

ROSARIO. [*Doubtfully.*] He told me he was a friend of Señor de Córdoba's. Isn't he?

IRENE. His best. [ROSARIO *gives a sigh of relief.*] By the way, talking of friends, [*She sits by* ROSARIO *confidentially.*] If you get this place . . .

ROSARIO. D'you think I shall?

IRENE. With that letter . . . yes, I think you're sure to.

ROSARIO. Oh!

IRENE. Well then . . . look out for that fat gentleman I was getting rid of when you arrived.

ROSARIO. [*Opening her eyes wide.*] Did I hear you calling him Don Juan?

IRENE. Yes, his name is Don Juan and he's always trying to live up to his name. He'll make love to you without ceasing. He'll bring you sweets, he'll interrupt your work to tell you stupid little jokes . . . But that doesn't matter . . .

ROSARIO. [*Opening her eyes wide.*] Doesn't it?

IRENE. But what does is that he has a horrible influence

over Señor de Córdoba. It's a secret, but you'll soon find it out. The man's mad enough about women in real life . . . but when it comes to literature he loathes us all . . .

ROSARIO. Does he?

IRENE. And he plots against us.

ROSARIO. How?

IRENE. You've read "A Spring Romance"?

ROSARIO. Of course.

IRENE. You remember the girl with fair hair who sells carnations and oranges on the banks of the Arno at Florence?

ROSARIO. [*As if she were speaking of her dearest friend.*] Bettina?

IRENE. [*As if* BETTINA *were her dearest friend too.*] Yes, Bettina Floriana, who falls in love with the handsome English painter—

ROSARIO. And then throws herself into the river . . .

IRENE. Because she finds out that he doesn't love her . . . that's to say he does love her . . .

ROSARIO. But he's married already.

IRENE. Well . . . *he* was to blame for that.

ROSARIO. Who?

IRENE. Don Juan!

ROSARIO. That nasty fat man?

IRENE. [*Much excited.*] Yes. The Englishman wasn't married at all to begin with. But he insisted, if you please, that it was much more artistic for a rich painter to deceive a poor flower girl than that they should get married and live happily ever after.

ROSARIO. [*Indignantly.*] And Señor de Córdoba let himself be persuaded?

IRENE. Yes . . . and why? Because Don Juan's a critic and writes for the newspapers! A critic! [*Contemptuously.*] Why he can't even spell. He sent me a love-letter one day—hid it under the typewriter . . . said my pretty hands as I worked looked like Carrara marble

. . . and spelt it with one *r*. Well, and now—not content with that—he's trying to have Juanita Llerena—are you reading "The Budding Pomegranate"?

ROSARIO. In the *"Revista Gráfica"* . . . yes of course.

IRENE. The dunderhead has made up his mind that Juanita . . . you remember she's studying chemistry—such a good idea—because she means to be independent, to earn her own living and marry Mariano Ochoa—

ROSARIO. Such a nice boy!

IRENE. But he is determined that she shall fail in her examination and then marry that rich old man who has been making love to her for years.

ROSARIO. [*Horrified.*] Don Indalecio!!

IRENE. [*With fatal affirmation.*] Don Indalecio!

ROSARIO. [*On fire with indignation.*] But it must be stopped.

IRENE. I'd like to know, he says, how a girl with her head full of poetry and stuff is ever to remember a dozen chemical formulae correctly.

ROSARIO. [*Combative.*] That's the sort of silly thing they all say.

IRENE. And besides, he asks, what girl nowadays will take a poor young man when she can get an old rich one?

ROSARIO. Disgusting!

IRENE. And, to crown all, won't it be time enough for her to be in love with the young man once she's married to the old one.

ROSARIO. The man is a shameless cynic.

IRENE. So now you see. And next week the chapter in which Juanita decides has to go to press.

ROSARIO. [*Terribly anxious.*] Is she going to marry the old man?

IRENE. It's still unsettled. Yesterday Señor de Córdoba gave me two sheets to copy in which she said yes . . . but when he saw the expression of my face he told me not to go on with them.

ROSARIO. [*With great relief.*] Ah!

IRENE. And I simply hate to go away in this uncertainty. Over poor Bettina—well, after all, death's a poetic end, one could make up one's mind to it. But this about Juanita is horrible.

ROSARIO. Revolting.

IRENE. [*Suddenly seeing the clock.*] Oh, good heavens—half past eleven! Paco has been waiting half an hour.

ROSARIO. Perhaps I'd better go, too.

IRENE. No, no—Señor de Córdoba will be in directly. He told me to wait till eleven, but he knew I had to go then. Would you tell him that I'll be here by nine in the morning.

[*She takes off her apron and puts it away; takes out a clothes brush and generally puts herself to rights.*] Guillermo, I'm going now! You don't know what a nuisance a wedding is, especially for me. I've no mother. I have to do everything myself. Paco is an angel and helps all he can, but like all men, he loathes shopping. Today we're going to buy saucepans.

[GUILLERMO *brings in her outdoor things.*] Thanks, Guillermo. This young lady will wait.

GUILLERMO. Yes, Señorita Irene.

IRENE. If Don Juan comes back before Señor de Córdoba does, don't let him in.

GUILLERMO. No, Señorita Irene.

IRENE. If the printer sends . . . the proofs are on the table.

GUILLERMO. Yes, Señorita Irene.

IRENE. Don't forget to change the water for the gold fish.

[GUILLERMO *through this has waited on* IRENE *like a perfect valet, handing her hat, veil, gloves, parasol, bag, etc. She goes to the gold fish.*]

IRENE. [*Putting her hand on the glass globe.*] Poor little things! I hate to leave you, too. [*To Rosario.*]

But you'll take good care of them, won't you? They only eat flies. We'll meet tomorrow.

ROSARIO. Thank you so much.

IRENE. And I trust you about Juanita. I think you can save her.

ROSARIO. [*Fired with excitement.*] Do you?

IRENE. Yes, I do. [*Mysteriously.*] Tomorrow I will tell you why. Good morning, Guillermo.

[*She departs.*]

GUILLERMO. Good morning, Señorita Irene. [*He notices that* ROSARIO *is standing by the gold fish.*] Are you wondering what the gold fish are for, Señorita? Señor de Córdoba always has them on his table while he works; he says that their twisting and turning helps him to think out the plots of his novels . . . especially the love episodes. [*Philosophically.*] Art must find inspiration somehow . . . and he drinks nothing but water as a rule. I bring them their flies every morning . . . a bagful—the boy at the grocer's catches them for me. [*A bell buzzes in the distance.*] The telephone! Excuse me a minute, Señorita.

[*He goes out.* ROSARIO *left alone looks curiously about and studies the typewriter with some apprehension. Then she returns to the gold fish and says half unconsciously.*]

ROSARIO. They do twist and turn—especially in the love episodes.

[*Without her hearing him* THE APPARITION *of the night before comes in. Seen in the full light he is an attractive man, close on 40. He puts down his hat and stick, closes the door softly and comes over to her and says with the most perfect suavity.*]

THE APPARITION. Do you like gold fish?

[ROSARIO *turns and sees him, and is quite as surprised and almost as alarmed as when he came through the window.*]

ROSARIO. Oh!

THE APPARITION. [*Reassuredly.*] Señorita.

ROSARIO. [*Backing away.*] Don't come near me.

THE APPARITION. [*Smiling.*] Do you still take me for a ghost?

ROSARIO. [*Passing from fright to indignation.*] Don't add mockery to persecution, sir.

THE APPARITION. [*Bowing with even greater amiability.*] I do most honestly protest . . .

ROSARIO. Isn't it enough to compromise me?

THE APPARITION. I . . . !

ROSARIO. What on earth made you throw my slipper in at the window?

THE APPARITION. You threw my hat out of it.

ROSARIO. Because I was sorry you should be going through the streets in the rain with nothing on your head.

THE APPARITION. [*Bowing, very pleased.*] Thank you . . . and I could not bear to think of the little foot, companion to that merciful hand, unshod.

ROSARIO. I had to pretend, and tell lies . . . and even to faint.

THE APPARITION. Was that very difficult?

ROSARIO. [*Much offended.*] I am accustomed to speaking the truth.

THE APPARITION. I have heard that women sometimes do.

ROSARIO. [*With immense dignity and emphasising the name with a certain contempt.*] Señor Don Obdulio Gomez . . . [*He starts at the name, then recollects and recovers himself.*] I think that you have some very mistaken ideas about women.

THE APPARITION. [*Meekly.*] Possibly.

ROSARIO. [*Very much the superior person.*] You seem to imagine that it flatters a woman to persecute her . . .

THE APPARITION. [*Interrupting her, with a certain seriousness.*] Forgive me . . . you have used that word twice in two minutes. As far as I am concerned it is quite uncalled for . . .

ROSARIO. !!!

THE APPARITION. Even at the risk of accusing you of . . . I am sure the most pardonable vanity . . . I protest that I have never had the least intention of persecuting you.

ROSARIO. [*In a challenging tone.*] Do you mean to tell me that you didn't come today knowing that I should be here?

THE APPARITION. [*Meekly.*] Yes, I can't deny that.

[ROSARIO *makes a gesture equivalent to "There, you see!"*]

THE APPARITION. I expected . . . if you insist upon greater exactness, I hoped that you would be. Are you offended? You have a most offended air, but somehow I don't believe you are. [*She starts to protest, but his mischievous, insinuating voice checks her.*] But what would you have thought of me if, when I'd met you so romantically, I had by the next day forgotten all about it?

ROSARIO. [*With intense scorn.*] Romantically!

THE APPARITION. [*Good-humouredly.*] Now don't be a hypocrite.

ROSARIO. Sir!

THE APPARITION. [*Going up to her with an agreeable "calinerie" as if her indignation was nothing at all.*] Can't you imagine how easily in a tangle of hair black as a black cat's . . .

ROSARIO. [*Unable to resist it.*] Such an "infernal tangle" of hair!

THE APPARITION. [*Continuing, as if he had not noted the aggressive tone of the interruption.*] . . . one's heart may be caught, for all that one twists and turns.

ROSARIO. [*Her eyes straying to the gold fish.*] Twists and turns . . .

THE APPARITION. . . . trying to escape from the snare. Not that one really wants to, perhaps.

ROSARIO. [*Who, as soon as she scents the merest whiff*

of a declaration in the air, feels apparently that she is behaving like an idiot.] Please don't talk like this . . .

THE APPARITION. [*Going a little closer and speaking in an insinuating tone, half tender, half mocking.*] Not that you really want me to either.

ROSARIO. It is most insulting.

THE APPARITION. You know you really are a terrible dragon. How is a man to guess that you'll take a few casual compliments in the course of a friendly conversation so seriously as this? What would happen if anyone started making love to you?

ROSARIO. [*Desperately disillusioned at this and at heart disappointed.*] In the course of—

THE APPARITION. But you don't take them seriously . . . or did you? Oh come now, you don't think I'm so simple as to fall in love with a woman just from seeing her with her hair down. Hardly!

ROSARIO. [*Now really on the point of throwing something at him.*] You dare say that to me . . . you dare remind me of that!

THE APPARITION. I, also, am accustomed to speaking the truth.

ROSARIO. [*With immense dignity.*] Leave this house immediately.

THE APPARITION. [*With mock resignation.*] Good heavens! Last night by the window . . . this morning at least it's by the door. But do you mean to spend your life in ordering me out of the house?

ROSARIO. Certainly, if you spend yours coming in when you are not asked!

[*He goes towards the door, then as if he could not bring himself to leave without a humble protest.*]

THE APPARITION. Women are so ungrateful.

ROSARIO. [*Falling into the trap.*] What have I to be grateful to you for?

THE APPARITION. The first real thrill of your life.

ROSARIO. [*Contemptuously.*] Seeing you jump through that window. You flatter yourself.

THE APPARITION. [*With affected modesty.*] Not because it was me you saw . . .

ROSARIO. [*Childishly.*] I wasn't in the least thrilled.

THE APPARITION. [*Trapped in his turn.*] Then, what in Heaven's name would thrill you I'd like to know.

ROSARIO. [*Pleased to have exasperated him, even a little.*] When I know I'll tell you. Perhaps it does take more than one has imagined.

THE APPARITION. [*Sarcastically appealing to the Heavens.*] Save me from the innocence of young ladies who read books like "A Spring Romance!"

ROSARIO. [*She shows the first signs of a serious attack of nerves.*] Oh do be quiet . . . and go away. [*He grows a little alarmed, puts down the hat which he had taken up and goes towards her. This makes matters worse.*] Don't come near me!

[*But he fears she is going to faint and goes nearer still.*]

ROSARIO. If you touch me . . . I shall scream.

[*More alarmed still he puts out his arms to support her, and at this she does scream.*]

ROSARIO. Guillermo! Guillermo! Guillermo!

[GUILLERMO *appears, calm and smiling.*]

GUILLERMO. Did the Señorita call? [*He looks alternatively at the "Señor" and the "Señorita" and smiles.*]

THE APPARITION. Bring a glass of water.

ROSARIO. [*Recovering her school-girl dignity.*] And please show this gentleman out.

[GUILLERMO *quite dumbfounded can only look at "this gentleman."*]

Don't you hear me?

[GUILLERMO *remains speechless.*]

Then will you be good enough to do as I tell you?

THE APPARITION. [*Coming to the rescue.*] He hears,

but is in rather a difficulty. For, if he shows me the door, I shall certainly kick him down the steps.

ROSARIO. [*Half comprehending.*] You'll kick him down—

THE APPARITION. [*Smiling.*] And we'd be sorry to part with each other, Guillermo and I.

ROSARIO. [*With alarm.*] So that you are—?

THE APPARITION. [*Bowing meekly.*] . . . and your favourite author.

ROSARIO. [*Amazed.*] You? [*Then with more wrath and astonishment.*] You! [*In the anguish of disillusion.*] You!

[*She throws herself in a heap on the sofa. This time* DE CÓRDOBA *is really frightened.*]

THE APPARITION. Guillermo, get that glass of water —and put some orange flower in it.

[GUILLERMO *goes.* DE CÓRDOBA *sits by her on the sofa and soothes her as if she were a child.*]

THE APPARITION. Forgive me. There, there! And don't cry, please. It's not worth it.

[*She goes on crying, without answering but is growing quieter, little by little, lulled by his caressing voice.*]

THE APPARITION. Is it really such a shock? Are you so disappointed that the Apparition has materialised into . . . me? Do look at me, please, and answer. Come now, little Rosario.

ROSARIO. [*Like an angry child, but taking out her handkerchief, to dry her tears, nevertheless.*] Don't call me Rosario.

THE APPARITION. I'm sorry, it came so naturally.

[GUILLERMO *brings in the glass of water and goes out again, discreet and silent.*]

THE APPARITION. Drink a little water . . . there's some orange flower in it.

ROSARIO. Thanks; I don't need it.

[*She gets up.*]

THE APPARITION. Where are you going?

ROSARIO. [*Like a lost child.*] Home.

DE CÓRDOBA. [*Getting up still holding the glass of water.*] No, no, no! Not till you are quite yourself again.

[*She has her parasol. He takes it from her. She glares at him.*]

DE CÓRDOBA. *Please.* [*She faces him aggressively.*] What will the concierge think if he sees you looking like this?

ROSARIO. Yes. . . . I suppose I'm a perfect fright.

[*Furiously she proceeds to put her hair tidy, and has to fling off her hat to start with.* DE CÓRDOBA *still clings to the glass of water.*]

DE CÓRDOBA. You really don't need the water . . . with a little orange flower?

ROSARIO. No!

[*He drinks it off—she sees him in the mirror.*]

ROSARIO. You do!

DE CÓRDOBA. [*Putting down the glass on the table.*] I tell you you gave me a scare.

ROSARIO. [*Sarcastically.*] Forgive me.

DE CÓRDOBA. [*Recovering his slightly mocking courtesy.*] I will exchange forgiveness with you . . . and I need yours rather more.

ROSARIO. Why did you tell me last night your name was—

[ROSARIO *turns on him and they stand face to face.*]

DE CÓRDOBA. Obdulio? Alas, it *is!*

ROSARIO. [*Who wishes, at all costs, to go on being angry and can't because* THE APPARITION, *in spite of everything, is extraordinarily attractive.*] Then Luis Felipe de Córdoba is a fraud you practice on the public?

DE CÓRDOBA. It's called a pseudonym usually. I ask you . . . how could a man named Obdulio set out to write romantic novels? Obdulio! With Gomez to follow! What woman of really refined taste would ever open a

book with that on the cover? Think how it shocked you last night!

ROSARIO. You could at least have told me who you were.

DE CÓRDOBA. [*Lowering his eyes.*] I didn't dare.

ROSARIO. [*Sarcastically.*] You were too shy? You are very shy!

DE CÓRDOBA. I was ashamed to. What! After you'd lauded my wretched books to the skies to say, "I wrote them?" What an anticlimax! I am only human. I really could not bear to have you disillusioned under my very eyes.

ROSARIO. But then . . . why did you give me the letter?

DE CÓRDOBA. Once again, I'm very human. And I was tempted.

ROSARIO. [*Looking at him askance.*] By what?

DE CÓRDOBA. Promise you won't fly out again.

ROSARIO. Don't be afraid.

DE CÓRDOBA. Well then . . . [*While he speaks he is stepping backwards and away from her as if he was afraid of her.*] I gave you the letter because I wanted so much to see you once more. And if last night—the moment we had cut ourselves loose . . . I'd asked might I call on you, you'd probably have said no.

[ROSARIO *looks at him cryptically, but says nothing.*]

DE CÓRDOBA. And if . . . advertisement for a secretary or no . . . I had asked you to call on me . . .

[ROSARIO *gives an indignant exclamation.*]

DE CÓRDOBA. You see! You'd certainly have said no —so what else could I do?

ROSARIO. [*With a certain soft bitterness.*] Having got me here though, you don't seem to mind how disillusioned I am.

DE CÓRDOBA. I mind very much. But . . . the fact is . . . I thought the horrid business would have been got over . . . I wasn't at home, you know, when you came.

ROSARIO. Did you think that I'd not have the courage to come?

DE CÓRDOBA. I was sure that you would. I went to the café at the corner and waited till I saw you pass. . . . Didn't you find my secretary here?

ROSARIO. Yes.

DE CÓRDOBA. Didn't you tell her why you came?

ROSARIO. [*Beginning to see the point.*] Yes!

DE CÓRDOBA. Didn't you give her my letter?

ROSARIO. Yes!

DE CÓRDOBA. But what did she say when she saw the handwriting?

ROSARIO. Nothing . . . the little wretch!

DE CÓRDOBA. Nothing! Good God! [*Quite overcome by the revelation he lifts his hands to his head.*] I have found a discreet woman.

ROSARIO. [*Tartly.*] A pity to lose her.

DE CÓRDOBA. [*Smiling.*] I must make a note of this.

ROSARIO. Well, I am glad I have helped you discover that there was something about women you didn't know. May I go now? Am I calm enough not to scandalise the concierge?

DE CÓRDOBA. Quite. And, therefore, there is now no need for your going at all. Please [*With caressing insistence*] be generous . . . say you forgive me.

ROSARIO. [*With some bitterness.*] For your practical joke?

DE CÓRDOBA. For a harmless bit of fun. I am older than you . . . but there are times when I do badly want to behave like a child. Do sit down.

[*Now she obediently does so and he takes her hat from her.*]

DE CÓRDOBA. Thank you. Do you think you could smile?

[*She can't help smiling.*]

DE CÓRDOBA. Thank you so much. Besides, it was a bit your fault, you know. You did seem such a little girl

. . . with your hair down . . . and those slippers which wouldn't stay on.

[*She frowns.*]

DE CÓRDOBA. Don't frown. I know how you dislike being treated like a child . . . a plaything—an inferior being; that—though you may not always look it—you are a very serious-minded person, an advanced thinker. Well, let's make a fresh start on that basis.

[*He sits at his table in a most business like way. She is on the other side of it.*]

DE CÓRDOBA. You have most kindly come in answer to my advertisement, and we have been more or less introduced. Or shall we leave that intruding busybody, Obdulio Gomez, and his confounded letter right out of it? Anyhow Luis Felipe de Córdoba has great pleasure in asking Señorita Rosario Castellanos this important question . . . Will you be my secretary?

[*At this moment* AMALIA *and* GUILLERMO *are heard in the hall and a moment later* AMALIA *comes in.*]

GUILLERMO. But he's at work!

AMALIA. Then he can stop for a minute.

[*She is a woman of thirty, dressed with aggressive elegance. Although it is morning she is wearing an exaggerated hat, and an afternoon dress. She is handsome, although one immediately feels that the square shawl and the high comb would suit her better than the hat and frock of a fashionable dressmaker. She walks in a little as if the room were her own.*]

AMALIA. Well, what happened to you last night? [*Then seeing* ROSARIO.] Oh sorry, sorry, sorry! Am I in the way?

[ROSARIO *on seeing her, jumps up.* DE CÓRDOBA *who has received a rude shock, gets up also, but dominates the situation almost immediately.*]

DE CÓRDOBA. Didn't Guillermo tell you I was at work?

AMALIA. [*Divided between confusion and impertinence.*] Yes, but not with . . .

DE CÓRDOBA. [*Without making any introduction.*] My secretary.

AMALIA. [*Quite indifferent to secretaries.*] Oh . . . is she? I want a word with you.

DE CÓRDOBA. [*To* ROSARIO.] Excuse me.

AMALIA. Come here!

[*They go towards the window.*]

AMALIA. [*Quite good-temperedly.*] D'you think it the right thing to keep a good woman waiting supper for you till daybreak and never even write her one of the usual lies to say you can't come? Why didn't you?

DE CÓRDOBA. I was caught in the storm and lost my hat.

AMALIA. Well, as long as you'd turned up with your head on—but don't lose that, will you? I shall so miss it . . . it's a handsome head.

[*She taps it with her fan.* DE CÓRDOBA *steals a horrified glance at* ROSARIO *who is studying the gold fish.*]

AMALIA. Oh, how cross we are when we're interrupted in the middle of a chapter!

[ROSARIO *makes a movement to go.*]

DE CÓRDOBA. [*To* ROSARIO.] Please don't go yet . . . I hadn't finished.

[ROSARIO *snatches the hat and parasol wrathfully and takes up a position where she can look out of the balcony.*]

AMALIA. But as for me . . . please do.

DE CÓRDOBA. If you don't mind.

AMALIA. I don't mind . . . I'll go one better and take you with me. Ain't I forgiving? You cut me for supper and I ask you to lunch. Hurry up . . . the car's waiting.

DE CÓRDOBA. I can't!

AMALIA. Why not?

DE CÓRDOBA. You know I work all the morning.

AMALIA. Very bad for you.

DE CÓRDOBA. [*Very seriously.*] I must finish what I'm doing.

AMALIA. Well, finish, my lad . . . [*She drops suddenly in a chair.*] I'll wait.

DE CÓRDOBA. How much work shall I do with you sitting there? I'll come along in half an hour.

AMALIA. Word of honour?

DE CÓRDOBA. [*Rather nervous.*] On the word of—a novelist.

AMALIA. [*Getting up.*] Ain't I an angel? With my best halo on too! 200 pesetas, straight from Paris . . . what do you think of it? I don't believe a word you say and I'm going to pretend I do and leave you to finish your chapter. Half an hour? I'll give you three quarters . . . and if I have to come back and fetch you, it's not your hat you'll lose this time but your hair . . . I'll pull it out bit by bit.

DE CÓRDOBA. You shall do anything you like. Goodbye. [*He gets her to the door.*]

AMALIA. [*To* ROSARIO *who does not respond.*] Good morning. [*In the doorway.*] Nice manners, hasn't she? Why do you have a woman for a secretary?

DE CÓRDOBA. Why do you have a man?

AMALIA. Because I can't spell. But at least he's my brother.

[*She goes out.*]

DE CÓRDOBA. [*To* ROSARIO.] One moment.

[*He follows to see her safely away.* ROSARIO *furiously jams on her hat and pulls on her gloves, seizes her parasol and, when he returns, is on her way to the door, too.*]

DE CÓRDOBA. [*Feigning a scandalised surprise.*] You're going?

ROSARIO. [*Drily.*] Good morning.

DE CÓRDOBA. [*Putting himself between her and the door.*] But you've given me no answer.

ROSARIO. [*Wishing to pass.*] My answer is good morning.

DE CÓRDOBA. [*With comic despair.*] But I've no secretary.

ROSARIO. Let me go . . . *please.*

DE CÓRDOBA. But who is to type my first chapter of a brand new story—such a good story, seething in my head —and I'm going to call it *"The Romantic Young Lady."*

ROSARIO. [*Unable to conceal her jealous anger any longer.*] That . . . "lady!"

DE CÓRDOBA. Now I ask you—!

ROSARIO. Then try her brother . . . since he can spell.

DE CÓRDOBA. Little Rosario . . .

ROSARIO. Don't dare call me by that name again!

DE CÓRDOBA. [*With humorous inflection.*] It's such a pretty name.

[*They might really be two children playing "tag" or "bull-fighting" because she is always turning about trying to get out, and he is always putting himself in her path, with slow, but mathematical movements. He does not lose his self-possession, but she grows more and more upset.*]

ROSARIO. Let me go!

[*Here she is on the point of getting out; but he detains her with a question.*]

DE CÓRDOBA. Do you know who that was?

ROSARIO. [*Pausing for a moment, which he takes advantage of to obtain a desirable position.*] The person, I presume you were on your way to last night when you unfortunately lost your hat.

DE CÓRDOBA. And when I'd so fortunately found my hat I did not go on my way. Well, who is to be blamed—or shan't we say thanked . . . for that?

ROSARIO. [*Sarcastic and aggressive.*] *Me?*

DE CÓRDOBA. Not precisely the indignant lady that I see now before me but—if I may disobey just once . . .

little Rosario. But you prefer to be treated as an up-to-date woman! Then cultivate some common sense.

[*She however taps the ground with her foot and looks at him with a dangerous expression.*]

DE CÓRDOBA. That's the first qualification, believe me. My quite friendly relations with Señorita Amalia Torralba . . . professionally known as La Malagueña—

ROSARIO. [*Furiously.*]—don't concern me in the slightest.

DE CÓRDOBA. [*Serenely.*] Then why are you so angry? Even a fairy princess, you know, straight out of a story book and worthy of any man's most loyal love, cannot expect a poor novelist, no matter how bewitching the curls are, to be faithful and true *before* he has had even a chance of rescuing his hat and losing his heart in the tangle. Last night, when I set out to supper, I didn't even know you existed. Now—I want you to be jealous . . . I love you to be jealous.

ROSARIO. [*Flaming with wrath.*] Jealous!!!

DE CÓRDOBA. [*Wishing to calm her.*] Señorita!

ROSARIO. [*Wishing to slay him.*] Did you say jealous?

DE CÓRDOBA. [*Defending himself.*] *Not that you* were—but that I *wished* you were.

ROSARIO. [*Stammering and trying hard to control herself.*] Why should I be?

DE CÓRDOBA. Quite so—you've no cause.

ROSARIO. I'm not talking of that woman!

DE CÓRDOBA. Ah, but I am—for the moment.

ROSARIO. And I think you're going to lunch with her.

DE CÓRDOBA. One should keep one's promise. I made it to get her to go.

ROSARIO. I did not want her to go.

DE CÓRDOBA. You only wish that she hadn't come.

ROSARIO. Not at all. I am glad that she came! And now, if you please, for the last time, before I call for help, will you let me go?

DE CÓRDOBA. But listen to reason. Pretend, just pre-

tend, for a moment that you are a strong-minded, cynical, up-to-date woman—

ROSARIO. [*Approaching hysterics again.*] I won't. Very well then, I can't—can't if you like . . . and don't want to be.

[*She flings out. He calls after her, "*ROSARIO! *Little* ROSARIO." *But the street door slams violently. Then he sighs and smiles, first with resignation, then with mischief, then tenderly; goes towards the balcony and remains looking out on the street, along which it may be supposed she is going away from him—all with the absorption of the true lover—until she may be thought to have turned the corner. Then he again sighs and smiles and after ringing the bell seats himself at his writing table.* GUILLERMO *enters.*]

DE CÓRDOBA. Guillermo, I want you to go yourself to Señorita Amalia's and explain why I can't lunch with her. I've been suddenly called out of town—I've gone already—and you might add that, as far as you know, I shan't be back for a fortnight.

GUILLERMO. Very good, sir.

[*He goes.*]

DE CÓRDOBA. A new story . . . "The Romantic Young Lady."—No, no—too good to write—too good to spoil by writing it.

ACT III

We are at DOÑA BARBARITA'S *house again. It is evening. The window stands open.* ROSARIO, *her three brothers, and* DOÑA BARBARITA *are present.* DOÑA BARBARITA *is seated in an armchair near the table, smiling as always. She is looking at an illustrated weekly.* ROSARIO, *buried in the sofa, wears an expression of profound ill-humour, which she tries neither to conquer nor conceal. The three brothers once more are all about to go out, but this time they are all in morning clothes.* EMILIO, *standing near the table, has just finished sealing a letter to his absent fiancée.* PEPE *is carefully smartening himself.* MARIO *is by the window, looking out.*

PEPE. [*To* MARIO.] Is it going to rain again to-night?

MARIO. I don't think so . . . not a cloud.

DOÑA BARBARITA. Nor a breath of air.

EMILIO. If there is a storm it'll get cooler.

MARIO. There won't be.

DOÑA BARBARITA. [*Fanning herself with her newspaper.*] One can't breathe!

ROSARIO. [*Aggressively.*] Dear grandmamma . . . if there's no air at least there's lots of cigarette smoke . . . and the boys enjoy that even if we don't. [*And she beats the air with her handkerchief.*]

MARIO. Hullo, how long have you disliked tobacco?

ROSARIO. Ever since I first smelt it.

EMILIO. You might have mentioned it earlier.

ROSARIO. Who am I to interfere with your pleasures? [MARIO *throws his cigarette out of the window.*] Oh, please don't start being unselfish—*now!*

[MARIO *looks at her with amazement, but says nothing.* MARÍA PEPA *comes in with a letter.*]

MARÍA PEPA. A letter.

ROSARIO. [*Rousing suddenly.*] Give it me.

MARÍA PEPA. It's for Señor Pepe.

[ROSARIO *flings back on the sofa again.*]

PEPE. [*Slyly.*] Were you expecting one?

ROSARIO. I? Who ever writes to me?

MARIO. [*Astonished.*] My dear Rosario, what's the matter with you?

ROSARIO. Nothing. What should be?

EMILIO. [*To* MARÍA.] Nothing for me?

MARÍA PEPA. Nothing.

EMILIO. Nor by the afternoon post. Sure?

MARIA PEPA. Nothing.

EMILIO. It's very odd. Two days running . . . no letter!

ROSARIO. [*Unpleasantly.*] Perhaps she has heard how well you amuse yourself without her . . . so why not without your letters as well? If I were she I'd throw you over tomorrow.

EMILIO. My dear girl!

[MARIO *goes to* ROSARIO*; takes her wrist with one hand—feels her forehead with the other.*

ROSARIO. What are you doing?

MARIO. Pulse rapid . . . head hot. I thought this bad temper wasn't natural.

ROSARIO. [*Rises and goes from settee.*] So now, I'm bad tempered, am I?

MARIO. No, my dear, with all your faults you are not . . . that is why this exhibition of it alarms me.

MARÍA PEPA. It's the heat.

ROSARIO. [*Yielding a little.*] I'm not ill nor cross . . . really I'm not . . . but bored, bored, bored!

PEPE. Then let's go out somewhere. Come along. What about the Winter Garden? La Malagueña is doing some new dances.

ROSARIO. Is she?

EMILIO. Ever seen her?

DOÑA BARBARITA. Here's a picture of her. [*In the paper she is reading.*]

THREE MEN. Graceful creature, isn't she?

PEPE. I love her. I love her!

MARIO. Yes . . . she has got that spice of something . . .

[ROSARIO *rages but nobody notices.*]

EMILIO. But they say she's getting quite spoiled. All these painters and writers that crowd round her only make her do things that don't suit her at all.

MARIO. Nonsense . . . she dances better than ever she did.

EMILIO. She's a Spanish gypsy, and while she's content to remain one she's perfect. But look at her dressed up as Madame Pompadour—absurd!

PEPE. Let her dress in a blanket with a rope round her waist—let some one introduce me to her—that's all. Now do you know why one wants millions of money? I love her . . . I adore her . . . I worship her! When she steps on the stage I feel funny all over. Come along, my child—hurry—we shall be late.

ROSARIO. [*Drily.*] Thank you—I think not.

PEPE. *Not!*

ROSARIO. If you're going to swoon with ecstasy when you see her I should have to carry you out.

EMILIO. I'll help. What a tribute to the lady!

ROSARIO. Oh . . . you're going, too.

EMILIO. Good! [*Then to* MARIO.] Aren't you?

MARIO. Worse luck . . . no. I've got work to do.

ROSARIO. Why don't I fall in love with a lion comique of the music halls?

THREE MEN. [*Highly scandalised.*] Really, Rosario!

DOÑA BARBARITA. Well, why shouldn't she? Bullfighters, singers, actors, dancers have always had great success with the ladies.

MARIO. With a certain sort of lady, no doubt.

EMILIO. A rather foolish, hysterical sort of lady.

ROSARIO. I see. If I lose my head over Nijinsky that's hysterics . . . but when you go stark mad about Pavlova you're just three normal, sensible, healthy young men.

PEPE. Oh, it's quite different.

MARIO. There *is* a difference.

EMILIO. Which I think I can explain.

ROSARIO. [*With a grim smile.*] Well?

EMILIO. Well—it goes rather deep . . . [*He stops, not knowing indeed how to go on.*]

PEPE. If we lose our heads . . . [*He stops too.*]

MARIO. But I don't admit that we do. We are conscious . . .

EMILIO. It's the difference of temperament.

ROSARIO. Don't get too tied up. There isn't any difference. But, for all that, you needn't be afraid . . . I shan't make that sort of a fool of myself. Still what puzzles me is how a man of real genius . . .

PEPE. [*Bowing.*] Thank you.

ROSARIO. . . . I'm not speaking of you . . . can go mad over a face that—well, look, it's nothing wonderful, and a pretty trick of kicking her heels up.

PEPE. Well—are you coming or not?

ROSARIO. [*A little more amiably.*] *Not.* Thank you all the same, but I'm tired.

EMILIO. [*Insinuatingly.*] Did you take too long a walk this morning?

MARIO. You were very late back to lunch.

ROSARIO. [*With renewed ill-humour.*] And last night I fancy you were not back at all—late or early.

PEPE. Really, my dear girl—you're impossible.

EMILIO. We'd better be off—she'll be throwing things at us. Good-night, grandmamma.

[*He bids good-night to his grandmother, kissing her hand.*]

PEPE. Shut the window tight in case the ghost comes back.

EMILIO. Yes . . . I'm afraid these nocturnal alarms upset poor Rosario rather.

PEPE. What annoys her is that the ghost didn't stay.

MARIO. Or abduct her. Remember the Rape of the Sabines. The Sabine ladies liked it.

EMILIO. Oh, some fellow came after the forks and spoons and made a mistake in the window . . .

PEPE. And got nothing but Rosario's slipper!

MARIO. And that he threw back!

PEPE. Well, it was too large for him!

[*The three young men laugh heartily.*]

ROSARIO. Oh, do go away and leave us in peace.

MARIO. I'll be home early, grandmother.

DOÑA BARBARITA. Oh yes, you're a wonderful watch dog.

MARIO. Well, you wouldn't let me tell the police.

DOÑA BARBARITA. What's the use? There's nothing missing—we've looked.

EMILIO. Very well . . . good-night.

PEPE. Till to-morrow.

[EMILIO, MARIO *and* PEPE *go out.*]

ROSARIO. [*Who has gone sulkily up to the table, and picked up the illustrated paper that contains the picture of La Malagueña almost without knowing what she is doing.* All three of them . . . cracked about that worthless creature. I detest men! [*Throws down the paper.*]

[MARÍA PEPA *has just come on again.*]

MARÍA PEPA. *That's right.*

DOÑA BARBARITA. [*Severely.*] It is very wrong.

ROSARIO. [*With the air of a little girl who is enjoying her own fit of temper.*] Why wrong?

DOÑA BARBABITA. One doesn't alter things by hating them.

ROSARIO. And is it an inevitable law of nature that some man should be able to poison one's whole life?

[*She sits down near the table, takes a lace-making pillow, which is on a chair, and begins to work furiously.*]

DOÑA BARBARITA. Is "poison" quite the right word?

MARÍA PEPA. They wipe their boots on us.

DOÑA BARBARITA. And you hold your tongue. You know perfectly well that I don't like to hear women abusing men. It is exceedingly vulgar.

MARÍA PEPA. They abuse us enough. You don't know half the things they say—and none of us know the other half.

DOÑA BARBARITA. That makes it no better. If men and women can't share the burden of life between them—

MARÍA PEPA. With the man sneaking out from under his share whenever he can!

[*Rosario has been trying to work at the lace she has in hand. She now gives it up in despair. Throws the lace pillow violently on the table; the bobbins roll about mixing themselves up.*]

ROSARIO. I can't do this . . . I simply can't. The bobbins get mixed, the threads break, all the pins bend! Lace making is idiotic work!

DOÑA BARBARITA. [*Severely.*] My dear, this is like a spoiled child.

ROSARIO. Oh . . . and who am I spoiled by I'd like to know?

DOÑA BARBARITA. By everybody.

ROSARIO. I wish I were.

DOÑA BARBARITA. By me, by your brothers, by life itself. And because in twenty-two years you have never had a pain or a sorrow you think you've the right to behave like a baby when anything annoys you.

ROSARIO. Nothing has annoyed me.

DOÑA BARBARITA. That makes it all the worse.

ROSARIO. [*Sitting down on the sofa and holding her head in her two hands.*] It's only that I've got a most awful headache.

DOÑA BARBARITA. [*Smiling.*] Keep those excuses for your husband when you're married. They don't go down with other women—you have no headache.

[ROSARIO *looks at her a little alarmed, a little guiltily.*]

I ask you no questions. But when a girl can't control herself she had better shut herself in her room and not make other people uncomfortable.

MARÍA PEPA. [*Firing up, as indignant and distressed as if she herself were being scolded.*] That's right . . . now scold the poor child.

DOÑA BARBARITA. I am not scolding her. I'm trying to teach her to control her nerves—for she'll need to know how.

MARÍA PEPA. I like to hear you talk about nerves; if I had as many pennies as you've had attacks of nerves in your life—

DOÑA BARBARITA. At the right moment. Never at the wrong.

MARÍA PEPA. The poor dear child.

DOÑA BARBARITA. Don't make a fool of yourself . . . and what's more important—don't make one of her. There's no need for any one to pity her.

ROSARIO. [*Suddenly showing both good temper and good sense.*] I'm sorry grandmamma, I'm a fool . . . and unjust . . . and ill-tempered.

MARÍA PEPA. Oh, well . . . if you're going to call yourself names—!

[ROSARIO *smiles affectionately at* MARÍA PEPA. *Then sits down at her grandmother's feet, who strokes her hair soothingly.*]

DOÑA BARBARITA. You'd better go to bed—you said you were tired.

ROSARIO. But not sleepy—[*She looks at the window.*]

DOÑA BARBARITA. [*Following her look.*] Well, nor am I . . . so let's sit up together. [*To* MARÍA PEPA.]

You can go if you want to . . . my granddaughter will help me undress.

MARÍA PEPA. [*Touchy, as always.*] And I should like to know why I must be supposed to get sleepier than you! But, of course, if I'm in the way—

DOÑA BARBARITA. Sit down then . . . and don't talk nonsense.

[MARÍA PEPA *sits down again. There is a silence.* MARÍA PEPA *yawns.* ROSARIO *sighs.*]

DOÑA BARBARITA. Won't you read aloud a little? That would distract our minds. What about the novel we began the other night?

MARÍA PEPA. [*With profound contempt.*] The one about the painter man who made a fool of the girl that sold oranges and she having no sense at all threw herself into the river? What's the use of a book like that? Pages and pages to tell me something that I can learn much better by sticking my own nose any day I choose into any corner of this miserable world. There was Encarna, the porter's daughter, taken in by just such another man . . . not a painter, he taught the piano, but it's the same thing. Off he went after a while and left her with something to remember him by. She didn't throw herself into the river because it's only a foot deep, but she drank half a bottle of disinfectant—and the wonder is that she and the baby were saved. Now that's true and the book was only lies!

DOÑA BARBARITA. Have you quite finished talking nonsense?

ROSARIO. No . . . I think you're right, María. Novels are lies—and then men who write them laugh in their sleeve at us—and themselves, too.

DOÑA BARBARITA. What do you know about it, my dear?

ROSARIO. [*With sentimental bitterness.*] I should if I were they . . . at such fools of women.

MARÍA PEPA. Well, if you're not going to read I'll put out the light. They keep telling us to save all we

can—and the metre ticks it up like a taxi-cab. Moonlight's cheap—[*She turns out the light. There is a bright moon.*] —and good.

[*There is another silence.*]

ROSARIO. Too hot to sleep!

DOÑA BARBARITA. Shall we tell a rosary?

[*She takes out her rosary and, at that moment in through the window flies a man's straw hat, falling at their feet.*]

ROSARIO. Oh!—what's that?

MARÍA PEPA. [*Picking it up.*] A hat!

ROSARIO. [*Very agitated, but mischievously satisfied for all that the adventure is not over.*] Well, now we shall see!

DOÑA BARBARITA. See what, my dear?

MARÍA PEPA. But there's no wind tonight.

ROSARIO. [*Frightened for her secret.*] Still—oh better shut the window, perhaps.

DOÑA BARBARITA. Do nothing of the sort. Let them climb up and come in. Then we shall know what this is all about.

MARÍA PEPA. Come in! And we have our throats cut! There's not a man in the place.

ROSARIO. Come in . . . no! No!

[*Outside is heard the noise of someone climbing.*]

DOÑA BARBARITA. Sh! They are climbing up.

MARÍA PEPA. Help! Help!

DOÑA BARBARITA. Be quiet.

ROSARIO. Shut the window.

DOÑA BARBARITA. Leave the window alone.

MARÍA PEPA. Help—thieves—police!

[*Looking in her terror for something to protect herself with she seizes the "sheep dog" paper weight from the table and hurls it through the window just as a man's head appears there. It catches him full on the forehead. An exclamation follows that sounds very like a curse. Then silence.*]

DOÑA BARBARITA. Now, what have you done?

MARÍA PEPA. [*Proudly.*] I threw it at him.

ROSARIO. At who?

MARÍA PEPA. How do I know . . . ? But it hit him hard!

ROSARIO. Oh, my God!

[*She drops on the sofa, half fainting—the two others go to her.*]

DOÑA BARBARITA and MARÍA PEPA. What's the matter?

ROSARIO. Nothing . . . that is . . . [*Seizing her grandmother's hand.*] Grandmamma, there's something I'd better tell you.

DOÑA BARBARITA. Yes, my dear, yes. [*Then, to get rid of* MARÍA PEPA.]—Now, you can shut the window.

[MARÍA PEPA, *fully aware that she is being got out of the way, does so.*]

ROSARIO. Grandmamma . . . last night . . . .

[*At this moment there is a loud knocking on the street door.*]

MARÍA PEPA. Someone at the door?

ROSARIO. The door?

DOÑA BARBARITA. Obviously.

MARÍA PEPA. It's the police.

DOÑA BARBARITA. That's all you've done by screaming.

MARÍA PEPA. Shall I go?

DOÑA BARBARITA. Of course—and turn on the light.

MARÍA PEPA *goes and in a moment her voice is heard distressful and alarmed; also* DE CÓRDOBA'S.]

DE CÓRDOBA. There's nothing wrong, I assure you . . . nothing at all.

MARÍA PEPA. Holy Virgin!

DOÑA BARBARITA. Whatever is the matter?

ROSARIO. [*Calling.*] MARÍA PEPA!

[MARÍA PEPA *appears again—her eyes starting.*]

ROSARIO. Who is it?

DOÑA BARBARITA. Is it the police?

[María Pepa *shakes an agitated head.*]

Rosario. Is it—the thief?

María Pepa. [*Bursting into speech.*] I don't think he is. It's . . . a gentleman!

Doña Barbarita. Show him in.

María Pepa. Oh, he's coming in! And don't be frightened. The poor thing . . . is wounded.

Doña Barbarita and Rosario. Wounded?

[Doña Barbarita *and* Rosario *hurry impulsively to the door, much alarmed but before they can reach it,* De Córdoba *appears quite at his ease, as usual. In one hand he has a handkerchief with which he staunches the wound in his forehead; in the other the "sheep-dog."*]

De Córdoba. Nothing serious, dear ladies . . . please don't be alarmed. A slight contusion from this little "objet d'art et vertu" which came flying out of the window as I was passing by . . . and which I now have the pleasure of returning to you—intact.

Doña Barbarita. The "sheep-dog!" [*Reproachfully.*] María Pepa!

María Pepa. [*In extreme affliction.*] Don't say anything more to me. I feel dreadfully about it. It was sure to be that nasty animal, too . . . the first thing that came!

[De Córdoba *shows no sign of knowing* Rosario *who having given an exclamation, almost of triumph, on his appearance, now maintains an impersonal silence.*]

De Córdoba. I hope you will forgive my intruding on you in this rather unconventional way, but . . .

Doña Barbarita. [*Very distressed.*] But it is we must ask your forgiveness. Dear me! you are bleeding dreadfully.

De Córdoba. Well . . . if you had a bit of court plaster—

Doña Barbarita. Plaster won't do. We'll take more

care of you than that. Sit down, please. María Pepa, bring me some hot water and some lint and a bandage.

[María Pepa *goes out.*]

Doña Barbarita. Child, don't stand there like a statue . . . come and help.

[*She says this, while through her glasses, she is examining* De Córdoba's *wound.*]

De Córdoba. [*With a twinkle.*] I do hope I haven't alarmed her. Is she very easily upset?

[Rosario *makes an angry gesture, but approaches.*]

Doña Barbarita. The hair will have to be cut. I'll get my scissors.

[*She goes out quickly. As soon as they are alone* De Córdoba *seizes* Rosario's *hand.*]

De Córdoba. Little Rosario . . . are you still angry at me?

Rosario. I consider you utterly contemptible.

De Córdoba. With my head cut open!

Rosario. I didn't cut your head open. But what else did you deserve?

De Córdoba. [*Half jesting and half supplicating.*] Rosario!

[María Pepa *enters with a beautiful antique silver water basin and jug, and a basket with bandages, gauze, cotton wool, etc., and puts it all on the table.* Doña Barbarita *comes in after her with a pretty scissors-case, a little silver bowl, and a small bottle of collodion. Everything is very dainty and pretty, as is usual with old ladies who don't any more have anything but details to live for, and who have always been accustomed to an infinite number of feminine refinements.*]

Doña Barbarita. Now—let us see! . . . Water, María Pepa!

[María Pepa *pours some water from the silver jug into the basin and comes up.*]

Child, you cut the hair. Your eyes are good.

[ROSARIO *seizing the scissors which her grandmother gives her, and treating* DE CÓRDOBA'S *head with no great respect, cuts off a large lock of hair.*]

DOÑA BARBARITA. [*Scandalized.*] My dear . . . not all that!

DE CÓRDOBA. [*Slyly.*] Her hand is shaking. No wonder! What a shock to you all!

ROSARIO. Not in the least, thank you . . . but your hair is so . . .

DE CÓRDOBA. Tangled . . . infernally tangled. And it never used to be.

DOÑA BARBARITA. That's all right . . . I can manage now. [*She puts* ROSARIO *aside and sponges the wound.*] Now a little collodion. [*She applies a little.*] Does it smart?

DE CÓRDOBA. [*With an eloquent gesture.*] Doesn't it!

DOÑA BARBARITA. All the better. Now the bandage, child. There—the scar will hardly show.

[ROSARIO *has watched his sufferings with great composure, ignoring completely his appealing looks.*]

MARÍA PEPA. [*With deep sympathy.*] Think if it had been on the nose!

DOÑA BARBARITA. [*Washing her hands and drying them with a towel.*] Now would you like a comb and a looking-glass?

DE CÓRDOBA. [*Rising.*] No, indeed. I've given you quite enough trouble for this evening. But if I might call on you at a more reasonable hour—

DOÑA BARBARITA. Why of course! But we must introduce ourselves. I am Señora de Castellanos.

DE CÓRDOBA. And I am Luis Felipe de Córdoba.

DOÑA BARBARITA. [*With great surprise.*] The writer?

DE CÓRDOBA. [*Bowing.*] Yes.

DOÑA BARBARITA. [*Looking at* ROSARIO.] The famous author of "A Spring Romance."

[*On hearing this* María Pepa *stares at him as if he were a prehistoric animal.*]

De Córdoba. Am I famous?

María Pepa. Wasn't it he wrote that beautiful story about the painter and the orange-girl? And you said you were dying to know him. Now I see him I don't wonder.

[Rosario *thus appealed to is covered with confusion. But* De Córdoba *bows his acknowledgments to* María Pepa.]

Doña Barbarita. [*Scolding her good-naturedly.*] María Pepa!

María Pepa. Well, he's very handsome. I'm old enough to be able to tell him so, God knows.

Doña Barbarita. Take all this away.

[María *goes off with the bowl, jug etc., smiling sweetly upon* De Córdoba *who, when she has gone puts his hand to his head and reels slightly.*]

Doña Barbarita. What is the matter?

De Córdoba. Nothing—I'm a little giddy.

Doña Barbarita. Of course . . . the blow and the loss of blood. Sit down—just keep quiet.

De Córdoba. Oh, Señora!

Doña Barbarita. I'll get some brandy—

Rosario. I'll go.

Doña Barbarita. No, stay where you are—I have the keys.

[*She goes out. Once more* De Córdoba *seizes* Rosario's *hand.*]

De Córdoba. Let me kiss the hand that wounded me.

Rosario. It was María Pepa's.

De Córdoba. [*With ironical pathos.*] I'd sooner think it was yours.

Rosario. I mightn't have aimed so well.

[Doña Barbarita *comes back with a little decanter of brandy and a glass.*]

DOÑA BARBARITA. Here is the brandy.

[*She gives him some.*]

DE CÓRDOBA. So many thanks! Excellent brandy!

ROSARIO. [*Sarcastically.*] You prefer it to water? . . . with a little orange flower in it?

DOÑA BARBARITA. [*Alert, but not knowing what on earth she means.*] My dear!

DE CÓRDOBA. I much prefer it. [*Smiling.*] And, for the future, I'll keep some in my study for the benefit of nervous, highstrung visitors.

DOÑA BARBARITA. Ah! . . . do many ladies come to call on you?

DE CÓRDOBA. [*Modestly.*] Quite a number.

ROSARIO. [*Aggressively.*] Actresses . . . and people of that sort?

DOÑA BARBARITA. [*A little scandalised.*] My dear child!

DE CÓRDOBA. [*Smiling.*] An actress will drop in sometimes.

DOÑA BARBARITA. Well, do you feel better?

DE CÓRDOBA. Much better, thank you. Well enough to take my leave.

DOÑA BARBARITA. No, indeed . . . I insist on your resting a little longer.

DE CÓRDOBA. Oh, but—

DOÑA BARBARITA. And, my child, I think we'll all have some tea or some chocolate and cake. María Pepa!

[MARÍA PEPA *appears so quickly that she could only have been just on the other side of the door.*]

MARÍA PEPA. Well, which—tea or chocolate?

DE CÓRDOBA. Oh, not for me, indeed!

DOÑA BARBARITA. We don't often have so distinguished a guest. [DE CÓRDOBA *bows profoundly.*] And it has been a most trying ten minutes for us all. We shall be the better for a little refreshment—I shall be.

[*She seats herself in her chair.* DE CÓRDOBA *is*

standing by the writing table. ROSARIO *manages to say to him sotto voce.*]

ROSARIO. You're caught now! Yes, it's very late . . . but you can't get to the theatre in time to see her new dances. Will her picture console you, perhaps?

[*She lays the illustrated paper in front of him.*]

DE CÓRDOBA. Very like her, isn't it?

[MARÍA PEPA *has now gone for the chocolate. There is a silence.*]

DOÑA BARBARITA. Aren't you two going to sit down?

[*They do. And now the air of a formal call supervenes.*]

DE CÓRDOBA. What a charming house you have!

DOÑA BARBARITA. Old fashioned, but convenient. This is my grandson's study. He is a writer, too.

[DE CÓRDOBA *throws out a polite "Ah," although he takes no interest in that whatever.*]

DOÑA BARBARITA. We are all interested in literature and great admirers of yours. So, though we're sorry you were hurt, we can't but be pleased at the chance of meeting you.

DE CÓRDOBA. Señora, the pleasure is mine.

DOÑA BARBARITA. But you have paid rather dearly for it.

DE CÓRDOBA. Oh, *that* wound isn't mortal. [*He gives a glance at* ROSARIO.] And, even if it were—"One man the less, one flitting ghost the more."

DOÑA BARBARITA. Ah . . . I recognise that quotation. I have the whole passage in the album I kept as a girl written out in the author's hand-writing. No, I didn't know him personally, but I imitated it from a facsimile there was in the newspaper. It was quite the thing in those days to keep an album and get famous men to write and draw in it—if you could—

DE CÓRDOBA. It still is.

DOÑA BARBARITA. What a nuisance you must find it!

DE CÓRDOBA. A perfect plague.

DOÑA BARBARITA. Yes, I feared you'd think so.

DE CÓRDOBA. But for you . . . Good heavens—why nothing would give me greater pleasure.

DOÑA BARBARITA. [*Delighted.*] Child, get my album at once. The last verses were written, I'm afraid, in 1865. It was still possible then to call me young and golden-haired without taxing too much poetic license.

[*The precious album is produced.*]

DOÑA BARBARITA. Write something romantic in it. I've not lost my love for romance.

[ROSARIO *puts the album on the table.* DE CÓRDOBA *sits down and she silently hands him a pen. They are now hidden from the old lady in her chair.*]

DE CÓRDOBA. [*Sotto voce, pretending to write.*] You don't look nearly so pretty when you're cross.

ROSARIO. I'm glad to hear it.

DE CÓRDOBA. Couldn't you relax just a little?

ROSARIO. No.

DE CÓRDOBA. [*Aloud to* DOÑA BARBARITA.] Shall it be in prose or verse?

[*As soon as she stopped talking,* DOÑA BARBARITA, *overcome no doubt by fatigue, had begun to nod. The voice rouses her, but only a little.*]

DOÑA BARBARITA. Eh? Prose or verse? Prose, if you please . . . poetical prose.

[*She nods again.*]

DE CÓRDOBA. If I were you d'you know what I'd do?

ROSARIO. [*Quite childishly.*] Something stupid, probably.

DE CÓRDOBA. I'd answer yes or no to the question we left unsettled this morning . . . Will you be my—

ROSARIO. [*Interrupting him furiously but without raising her voice.*] I will be nothing whatever to you. Sh! Grandmamma!

DE CÓRDOBA. She's asleep. [*Then with a good deal*

of feeling in the jest.] And I was just beginning to fancy that you might be so much—almost everything.

ROSARIO. [*Very inconsequently.*] Why "almost"?

DE CÓRDOBA. Do you think that any woman can completely fulfil a man's requirements . . . no matter how perfect she may be?

ROSARIO. Are you wise then to be so particular?

DE CÓRDOBA. Wise or unwise . . . I want you . . .

ROSARIO. For a secretary?

DE CÓRDOBA. I want you.

ROSARIO. [*Looking towards her grandmother in partly pretended alarm.*] Good heavens—sh!

DE CÓRDOBA. [*Coaxing.*] Won't you answer?

ROSARIO. [*Looking at him askance, but with a little smile.*] What salary do you offer?

DE CÓRDOBA. To my secretary. Four hundred pesetas a month.

ROSARIO. It's very small.

DE CÓRDOBA. Six hours a day—and quite pleasant work.

ROSARIO. But it costs so much to live in these times.

DE CÓRDOBA. If you'll marry me as well I'll add board and lodging for nothing.

ROSARIO. [*Very haughtily.*] Thank you, I want nothing for nothing.

DE CÓRDOBA. Well, I'll raise your salary. Four hundred as secretary and three hundred and fifty as wife—with board besides—separate board. You might ask me to dinner sometimes. I shall ask you regularly on Thursdays and Mondays.

ROSARIO. [*With a little quiet and rather happy laugh.*] How absurd you are!

DE CÓRDOBA. Thank God! I've heard you laugh again. Well, will you or not?

ROSARIO. [*The modern woman with a vengeance.*] What guarantee can you give?

DE CÓRDOBA. For the money?

ROSARIO. [*Sentimentally.*] That we shall be happy?

DE CÓRDOBA. None.

ROSARIO. What?

DE CÓRDOBA. Well, what guarantee can *you* give me! Happiness, believe me, is a very strange thing. You may find it by looking for it, or it may come by pure luck. And, looking back you may find you weren't happy when you thought you were . . . or unhappy, for that matter, when you thought you were either. Guarantees are no good, oh yes, I know—people always promise each other a heaven on earth. There's no such thing.

ROSARIO. [*Protesting.*] Isn't there?

DE CÓRDOBA. In the last chapters of novels . . .

ROSARIO. [*Resentfully.*] Your novels?

DE CÓRDOBA. My last chapters are shockingly bad, don't you think? I'm always too anxious to finish. But life's not a novel.

ROSARIO. [*Now playing at disillusion.*] Alas, no.

DE CÓRDOBA. But a far better book than the best of us ever will write . . . such a good story, full of passion and thought, full of mysteries and revelation . . . worth living, and better, far better, worth sharing. No, little Rosario, I can't promise you, or you me that love will be heaven on earth. But it will be life. No more than life —but nevertheless, I mean well—but I've lots of faults. So have you.

ROSARIO. [*A little peevishly.*] Of course, I know that.

DE CÓRDOBA. . . . Or you wouldn't be human. Well, shall we try the journey together? No doubt we shall stumble a bit—and one or the other may fall now and then. But that won't matter, will it? If the one that is up helps the one that is down. I don't think we'll both ever be down together . . . that would be awful luck.

ROSARIO. [*Whispering.*] Yes.

DE CÓRDOBA. We shall have troubles—who hasn't! but we'll laugh at them when they'll bear it. We'll work

a great deal and we'll always have faith in our work—that's how one keeps young. We'll never think we're important people . . . so that a bit of success will always seem a little bit more than we deserve—and we'll be as pleased with it as a child with his new shoes . . .

ROSARIO. [*Like a vexed child.*] That would be all very well if you loved me . . . But you don't love me.

DE CÓRDOBA. How on earth do you make that out?

ROSARIO. Because you've been mocking me all the time. That's not like love. With the hat . . . with the letter you wrote yourself . . . and even when you walked in with the sheep-dog.

DE CÓRDOBA. And my head broken.

ROSARIO. [*Quite childishly.*] Yes . . . that was one to me . . . though I didn't do it. But the only one.

DE CÓRDOBA. And how beautifully I bear it! Little Rosario . . . I couldn't have slept tonight if I'd not made peace with you. Would you rather I'd sent you a letter in my best literary style. "Señorita, since first I had the joy of looking in your face . . ." I thought you had a little more real imagination than that!

ROSARIO. [*Falling into his trap.*] Indeed, but I have.

DE CÓRDOBA. Oh, then why is it that I . . . so old and serious . . . must be teaching you that the way to get the best out of even the most serious things in life is still . . . to keep your sense of humour about them?

[*She says nothing, so now he goes very close to her.*]

DE CÓRDOBA. Well, which is it to be? Will you take the chance of being loved all your life by a man who gets his head broken so that he may sit here and talk a little real common sense to you?

[ROSARIO *longs to say yes, and struggles . . . apparently just with her inability to say it. Then suddenly* DOÑA BARBARITA *looks up.*]

DOÑA BARBARITA. Oh, my dear child . . . do say yes or no.

[*The two of them jump out of their skins as she says this. They had quite forgotten her. But* DOÑA BARBARITA *continues coolly.*]

Quite right to make difficulties up to a *point* . . . but—

ROSARIO. [*Stammering.*] Weren't you asleep?

DOÑA BARBARITA. My dear . . . do you suppose that in eighty years I've not been able to learn when to go to sleep and when to wake up again?

[*Then* ROSARIO *runs to her Grandmother like a child, kneeling, her head hidden in the old lady's lap.*]

ROSARIO. Oh, Grandmamma . . . You say it to him . . . you say it.

DOÑA BARBARITA. [*Caressing the child.*] And last night she was asking me for a latch key! She hasn't a mother, you know. I've spoiled her a little . . . and I'm so old now, perhaps I've forgotten what the things are she wants most to learn about life. I haven't been able to teach her, you see . . . even how to say yes.

[*But* DOÑA BARBARITA *gives her hand to* DE CÓRDOBA, *who kisses it and the "yes" is thus almost said. And, at the moment . . . as usual . . .* MARÍA PEPA *comes in.*]

MARÍA PEPA. Now don't you go away till she has said it . . . or she'll cry her heart out and give us a terrible time. For we all love you, all of us . . . even though it's not my place to tell you . . . that's true.

DE CÓRDOBA. Rosario!

ROSARIO. [*Getting up and facing him, smiling, still shy, but bold.*] One condition! Juanita—

DE CÓRDOBA. Who's Juanita?

ROSARIO. You haven't forgotten . . . the girl in your new book!

DE CÓRDOBA. Good heavens! . . . I had!

ROSARIO. She's not to marry Don Indalecio . . . not on any account whatever.

DE CÓRDOBA. She shall marry her Mariano on the day that you marry me.

ROSARIO. And pass her examination?

DE CÓRDOBA. With honours?

ROSARIO. [*Holding out her two hands to him.*] You promise?

DE CÓRDOBA. [*Taking her hands.*] I promise!

[*The two old people gaze at them with entire delight and* MARÍA PEPA *says, "Pretty dears"!*]